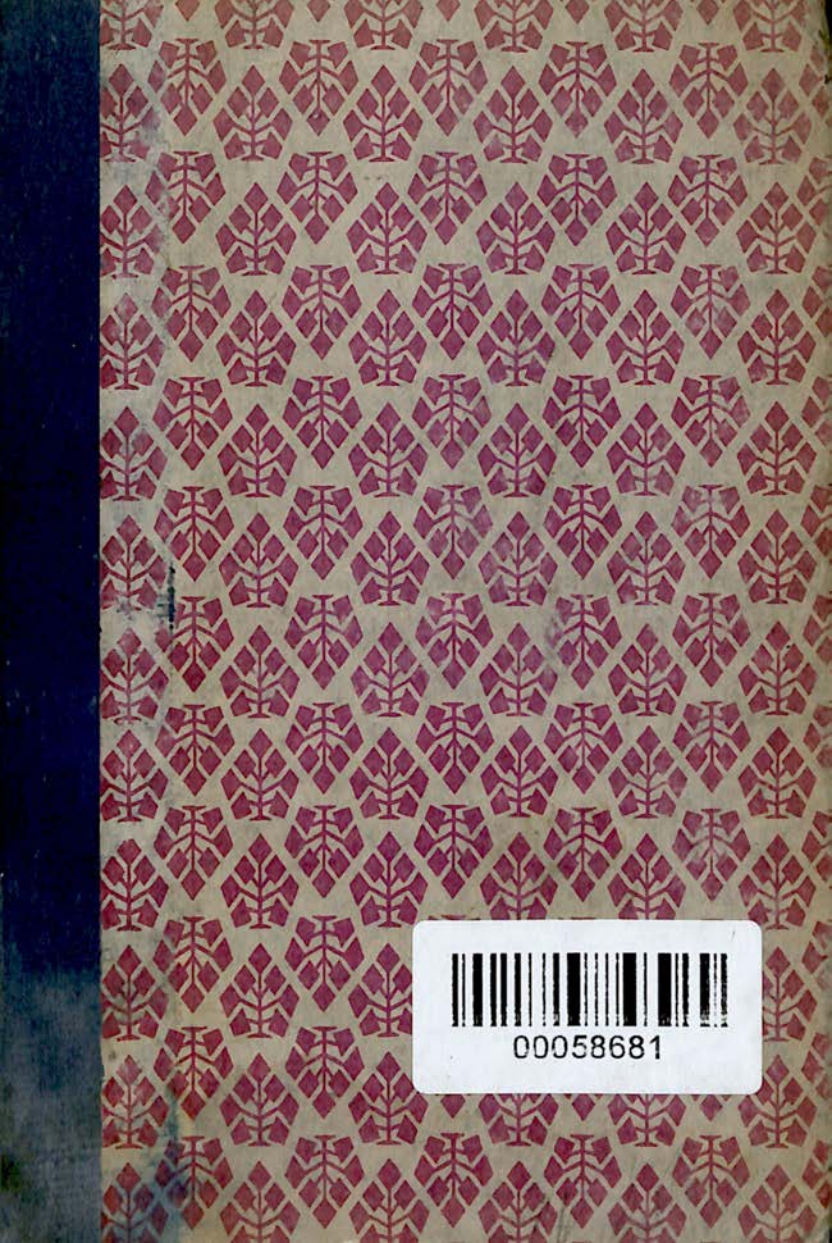
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EASANT LIFE

Sketches of the Villagers and Field-Labourers in Glenaldie

SECOND SERIES

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THE DYKE-BUILDER.

CHAPTER I.

"AY, wumman, puir Willie Bain's deean' the day!" "I heerd yestreen he wus vera low, the puir raitar! no lik' tae pass the nicht. He'll laive a waik widow and waik family."

Thus women spoke in the Square of the saddened death-bed in the village back street. With much feeling they spoke of it; such feeling as is a good and gracious thing; for, in the school of poverty, to sympathise is the heart's experience next best to suffering, teaching it preparation for the evil day, rendering it patient when the evil day comes.

But who shall tell the real anguish of the poor man's death-bed? Who can depict its environment of woe? Doubtless the sufferer is very weak, and weary of life, too worn and "low" to feel acutely, has suffered too much to be fully sentient of what he is going from, of all that he is leaving behind. Very soon he shall be at rest, rest as secure and tranquil as the last repose of the mightiest of monarchs. His little ones sit strangely

silent in the darkened room, darkened by their mother's shawl hung across the little window. They have been told that "their faither's deean';" but they comprehend it not, would gladly sneak out to play in the sunlight of the outer world, which they have been forbidden to do. But, woe is me for the poor woman at the bedside! Her heart is sharply wrung, for she knows and feels it all; the pain and wrench of the present, the want and toil of the morrow.

The sands of the man's life run very low, yet she is not ever by the bedside. Feebly he asks for drink, and she is not there to give him the barley-water, the only thing that has stayed on his stomach for days. "Rin, Wullie, and fetch yer mither," says the little girl, who holds another still less at the fireside; and Willie, a boy of ten, runs out to seek her. In the wee bit hen-house he finds her, low on her knees on the clay floor, wrestling with the Father of all life to raise up her husband to life again; crying to him, how earnestly, that this evil may pass from them. And the boy comprehends this somewhat—indefinitely feels the pathos of it, and the memory of that moment will surely cling to him with sanctifying influence till the cup shall come for his own drinking.

What shall the weak widow do to provide food for the three little ones committed to her, to her solely? I do not know what good it may operate; but when they had carried out her dead, she gathered the children beside the deal chair, firmly professed her faith in Him

who is the widow's stay and the Father of the fatherless, to Him committed her fatherless weans, weeping much while she did it. Sadly, thereafter, she set to wash the blankets in which her husband had lain down in his last sleep; and the barbed dart of this dispensation was rankling in her spirit while she washed them. But, lo! a marvellous providence! The bedclothes are not yet dry, when the old schoolmaster sends her boy to the surveyor who has come to map out our earl's estate, and the loon is engaged "to carry the chain." He shall have three shillings a week of reward. Dare we say that prayers go for nought? Of course this great fee has to be wrought for; but he is a stout, healthy boy, although poorly clothed and barefooted. Blithely he trots after the surveyor, for he is active and willing, and full of the importance of his service and its fee. He is keen for his porridge when he comes in at night; soundly he sleeps, but prompt and hearty he is again at nine in the morning in the Square, to start with "the gentleman," for hillside, or woodland, or lea; fortified by the piece of oat-bannock crammed into his pocket. A most material income was three shillings a week, the equivalent of two pecks of oatmeal, tenpence weekly laid up for their cottage rent, and a few pence "out ower."

She was but a commonplace woman this widow, of the average height and somewhat hard, certainly sorrowful of countenance; but surely she was inspired with an inspiration other than common. Perhaps it

simply came of the fact that, in former and happier days, she had kept a few hens in her back yard, that so she might have an egg sometimes for her husband's supper, might sometimes pay for his weekly modicum of tobacco with the price of a dozen of eggs sold to the merchant. But come the thought how it might, when her boy had earned his shillings for a week or two, she took her basket, left the two girl children alone in the cottage, and went into the country round about and bought eggs from who would sell; and sellers for money were abundant, beyond her power to purchase, for the merchant would only give goods in exchange. She bought the eggs at fourpence per dozen, or thereabouts; and, although the way was long, she carried them to Inverwick each Friday, twenty miles off, you know, but she almost doubled her money in their sale. No doubt she came home ofttimes sore of foot, and was sadly draggled on wet days. What was that to the mother who had to feed her weans?

November came, when the local roads could be versed no longer by the middle-aged woman, when gusty day in its shortened light no longer sufficed the forty miles walk to the market town and back, wh also "the Planners" ceased to go out. It was, howeve no longer necessary to walk the forty miles, for she h found a "decent and canny man" who dealt fairly her, and took all her eggs, receiving them in a box the carrier's cart, sending back to her "the bawbees their price, in a packet by the carrier. Then the b

took up the basket, and went his mother's rounds. He bought the eggs of the country folk, trading very astutely, having carefully learnt at the fire-side the several values of each egg in a dozen at all possible fluctuations of price. Thus the fatherless were fed, not with fat things, of course, but with food convenient for them, and the heart of the widow rejoiced in her son.

One afternoon the boy was returning through Howe laden with his basket and some four dozen of eggs. It was December, a mirky afternoon, and the sun had set. With whoop and halloo behind him came some of the young folk just released from the parish school, and they espying him, assailed him with cries of "Eiggs, eiggs!" "See tae the eigg-cadger!" Peacefully disposed, he quickened his steps, but they still closely followed, still shouted at "the cadger." He could not run away, being laden with the basket. At length with clods of earth and dubs they, tired of the monotony of shouting, began to pelt him; and when he had received a great thump on the back, he set down the basket and faced them. "I'm nae feart for ye," he said boldly. "Gie fair play an' I'll tak' ony o' yo singel." Then there was a shout for "Tom Murison" and "A fecht, a fecht!" And Tom Murison, the biggest boy of the party, put off his jacket and came forward. "What dae ye want o' me?" he asked.

"Am wantin' naething, but if ye'll no gie me paice, am ready to fecht ye fair," said the son of the widow.

"Ye ready tae fecht me! Man, I cud knock yer heid aff! There's fugie for ye!" and Tom struck at our boy.

Presently, as two young cocks might do, they sprang at each other, struck each the other as hard blows as he could. Tom was the bigger and heavier of the two, but Willie Bain was lithe and hardy; and for a time, while both were bleeding at the nostrils, the event hung in doubt. In the eager contest, however, poor Willie kicked the basket which he had laid down on the road and almost fell upon it, and, although his blood was up, he was instantly conscious of the terrible disaster involved in the breakage of his eggs. So he forgot the conditions of the battle, and got sorely punished in his unguarded face. He blubbered while Tom still heartlessly struck him, blubbering not for the blows but for his mother's eggs. Then a little maiden intervened, "Sure 's am here I'll tell the maister, Tom! Dinna ye see his eig smashed!" This threat of appeal to the schoolm stayed Tom's arms; and as the patter of a horse's h was heard approaching, the whole party fled away save the little girl. "Ye're bluddin' sair, puir loo said she pityingly. "Com' tae the ditch an' I'll w ye wi' ma daiddle."

The little girl lifted his basket carefully off the ro way, comforting him thus, "See, there's nae sae mo o' them brok' aifter a'!" And they descended to t grassy ditch, where the showers of winter were seeki

their way to the distant sea, gurgling as they hasted through the uncut reeds, and dipping her pinafore in the stream, she wiped the blood from the boy's bruised face. A farmer jogged past them on his pony and noticed them not, thought not at all that there, in the ditch, the lives of two little folk were being tinted and coloured, as ever life will be by the little things encountered and enacted by the wayside of its early progress.

The little girl picked up the basket, and seeing its contents greatly broken, the yellow yolks exuded and spread over the white shells, the boy lifted up his voice and wept and went his way home to his mother. He did not so much as bid "Good bye" to the lassie who had stayed the conflict, and had staunched his bleeding, and wiped his bruises; for his bruises and his concern were great. Twenty-two eggs were more or less damaged—sad loss of eighteenpence fully. And not less serious was the prevision of "the little cadger" that often as he passed through Howe, he must run the hazard of the like violence, like jeopardy of his eggs. As he lay in bed that night, somewhat feverish with his bruises, disposed to dream of the Howe boys beating him and pursuing him and carrying off his precious basket, with loud outcry, there came again to his aid and comfort that little girl, with auburn hair astream in the wind and flashing eyes, who had not scrupled to wet and besmear her "daiddle" to somewhat clear his marred visage.

His disastrous battle bore good results, results equivalent to victory. For the Howe boys, satisfied that he was ready to do battle to resist and resent assaults upon him, did not again assail him. He went to and fro unmolested thenceforth, save that, now and again, perchance some coward loon, at a safe distance, might hail him with the cry of "cadger." Perhaps you will wonder to hear that this earnest peasant boy felt that contumelious cry, had as much real pain from it, as if it had been a shameful and injurious blow.

A graver evil arose to him, enhancing the difficulty of winning a livelihood by the purchase and sale of eggs. The merchant put up his price for them, reducing, of course, the profit of his competitors. So to evolve a few shillings a week of gain, the number of dozens purchased must be doubled, and the country traversed far and wide to secure them. But the cadger boy understood and appreciated the issue, and rivalled his mother in the wide circuits which day by day he accomplished. And when by chance he brought home a number greater than the contents of her basket, when by visiting out-of-the-way places he had purchased at less prices than she had paid, did not his triumph and her praises amply repay his endurance? Thus through the long years of boyhood it was with him, often keenly exercised of mind, ofttimes heavily laden, ever anxiously awake to the value of half-pence, ever eager honestly to win them. Chiefly was he animated by the better, nobler desire to win the praises of his widowed mother,

competitor with him in this effort to provide the family food and raiment.

She was worthy too, this mother, to have her praises valued by her son, to whom her whole mind and heart were laid bare, showing one desire only—the intensified earnest will to fence and fend her little flock. She murmured not for wind or rain which might beset her on her basket-laden journey. But ever in the spirit of thankfulness she acknowledged the Goodness which had spared her thus to toil for the little ones, the Goodness which had given her this companion of her toil. Daily she poured forth her thanks and praise of Him, whose hand had upheld and fed them in the lowly ways of their life, even when life had seemed to be only blankness and coldness and want.

But boyhood is soon overpast, however long its years may seem in the fulness of premature care and trouble. And the boyhood of this boy was indeed a continuous strain and effort to keep off the wolf of famine. In their common effort for food and raiment and rent, he was drawn very near to his mother's heart, and his mother's heart was precious to him. Perhaps her heart might have been more joyed in if she had been less earnest and rigid, had been able to mix smiles soft and warmthful with the hard, niggard counting of the much-prized pence, to set forth the little folks' food with looks and words of love, as well as to incite the son with the precepts of wisdom. But heart and soul were cold within her for the coldness of the

world and of life that came to her with her widowhood, which made even her love of her bairns assume the form of care for them.

Boyhood being ended, as it is, by fifteen, Willie Bain, then, had to think of commencing the real business of life in an orderly way. He had not been to herd, for herding would only have supplied his own food and twenty shillings or thereby of summer wages. He was much more valuable than that in the earnest aid which he gave his mother in the weary battle which she had fought so long. But now the little lasses, her daughters, could tend cows, and needed not to depend on their mother; and they were gone out to win their bread. Therefore it was both possible and right that Willie should learn a trade. Of course it was in his choice "tae folloo horse," the peasant's phrase to indicate a life of farm work, but this he did not desire. And, indeed, he would not quit his mother; for the one ambition of his life was to labour for and with her.

Besides, as he wandered about, he saw another calling that attracted him. Here and there he saw long chain lengths of stone dykes springing up round grass fields or breaks of fallow land, and a great desire had seized him to become one of the useful men who improve the earth by fencing its fields. In fact, he would be a dyke-builder; a moderate ambition, you will allow.

Will it sound strange if I tell you that the poetry of humanity, inborn in all of us, its nonsense and unrea-

son, had shared in determining him to this choice? So in truth it was. In his rounds, buying eggs and rabbit-skins, and the like—for the widow had enlarged the range of her enterprise—one dyke-builder in the parish of Howe had specially won his notice. And there was no doubt the attraction lay mainly in this: that sometimes, when the boy passed by, "the dyker" was seated in the shadow of his dyke, eating his dinner; and that the girl, who had, in tin pail and bottle, fetched him the meal, was seated by his side. Her hair was auburn, her cheeks were bright and flushing, soft was the glance of her flashing blue eye; and Willie vaguely felt all these charms, although he scarcely dared look at her; although he certainly had spoken with her but once, and that was years ago; although associated with her were only memories of battle and pain and defeat. Even her name he did not know, yet there she was, affecting him, guiding him, although he knew it not, in his choice of an occupation, to the selection of her father's.

Lowly as his ambition was, it was not to be easily gratified. Dyke-building is merely a humble branch of masonry. Old men, unfit for the heavier forms of this trade, engage in it; a few also who have but imperfectly learned the trade, or who, having turned aside from it to cultivate crofts, eke out the income of the year by fence-building in their idle months. These men need no apprentices; and, pro-

perly, the business is no separate trade at all. How then was the youth to get engaged in it? He knew that to apprentice himself to a mason was his regular course; but men told him that he was too young for that by several years. Besides, in the spirit of money winning, so early instilled into him, the youth saw and was satisfied that if he got into this trade in his young days, he would do well, payment being by the yard of building; whereas, as a journeyman mason, which to be he must first serve six years' apprenticeship, he could see nothing better in store then wages for each week he wrought. Moreover, he knew that masonry was a fluctuating business in our strath, and that most of the village lads who had taken to it had been forced to leave their homes to subsist by their trade; and that was not in the programme of life which he had chalked out for himself.

He still hawked about for eggs and skins, a
retailed lucifer-matches, wistfully regarding the op
tions of the fence-builders at the Queybrae of La
when he passed that way, sitting sometimes besi
workmen in their dinner hour, while they ate
cold porridge and smoked their pipes thereafter.
were mostly elderly men. Sitting with them
picked up such crumbs of information regarding
work as converse and questions might draw from th
They made no secret of its essential points, whic
truth, are simple enough. Then he would watch th
carrying the principles of their craft into operati

"Jist as life oucht tae be—level found—level built and bound—level copit. It will tape tae the cope itsel', gin ye build it plumb," said one old man. "Staible wa's, like staible lives, stan' o' things dune on the square and laid level and plumb," said another; and the boy learned the mystery of the calling, and somewhat of the secret of life, from the treasured sayings of the rude masons.

But while the elder men were kindly communicative, he knew that the younger people of the district looked down on "the cadger boy," roughly classifying him with all wandering people, tinkers and the like, although he bought their goods with cash, although many little maids, mistresses of barn fowl, rejoiced at his coming—that even the matrons who took his money looked askance at him, having doubts of his strict regard for the rights of property. Even some of [illegible]e men, for example that solitary workman at Howe, [illegible]e daughter the lad dared not look at, seeing her [illegible]ily as he passed by, would not hold converse with [illegible]would bid him move on if he lingered about. This [illegible]f thing moved him in no ordinary way, causing him [illegible]t for labour of the ordinary and recognised sort. [illegible]ly could his mother retain him in the old life, [illegible]comprehending his objections to it at all: for, [illegible]ering much alone, thinking and bearing much [illegible]e, the boy was reticent of his feelings. I believe he would have turned to farm work, if it had involved separation from his mother. But life will

work out its own issue, "will tape to the cope," plan it as we may.

Our strath is no roseate vale, redolent of perfume, and we who people it find ours are not halcyon days. The shepherd pipes not on mellifluous reed. Our virgins dance not in the sunset to lute and tabor. Yet, somehow, the years roll away. Hard times, I fear, the rolling years are to many; and perhaps so it ever must be. But youth will go forward to climb the hill of life, rejoicing in the fact of climbing it; sometimes feeling extra gladness because it is stiff and steep to climb. At eighteen, William Bain was a dyke-builder of no small repute, reputed the more that he called no man "master." His mother's back yard and the old stone dyke that was its rear fence could have told a tale of patient practice; for he had taken down the wall, every stone, and having got a few loads of other stones, had rebuilt it, again a again, for at least a dozen times. Now he was for some time had been, openly professed of the He was so dexterous in his work, so persistent enduring, that he did work equal to that of tw three of the old men, and remuneration was by lineal yard. The country folks, knowing not his s schooling and apprenticeship, and wondering at results of his labour, deemed him a genius. They stowed on him the title of "the clacher," which, b interpreted from its Gaelic root—for a little Ga still lingers on the hillsides—means, "the man

stones." His early years of cadgerhood were all obliterated by the proud achievements of the hard-working "clacher."

The summer days are long on the hills, where the sweltering sun bakes the inky peat-moss brown; and to the half-broiled clacher, steadily working in the heat, the hours seem very long till two o'clock, when he rests and takes some food. Do you think it is because he has toiled from four o'clock, almost from the daybreak? Do you think it is because since then he has had only a bowl of oatmeal-brose at the farmer's cottage, because he is faint, and weary of rudely squaring the rough stones and setting them flat, that thus he longs? Nay, these have nought to do with it. He can bear labour and go unfed longer than most men. But see yonder old man at the distant end of the fence, with broad, blue bonnet scarcely binding his lyart locks, so long his grey hair falls about. Do you know him? Well, no matter. At two o'clock there [illegible]all come to him, bearing his dinner from afar, a [illegible]ph of the hills. Her hair, in the bright light, will [illegible] as gold unburnished; her blue eye will glance [illegible], for softness is of her nature; freshness and [illegible] bloom in her cheek. Her name is Kirsty [illegible]t. Willie Bain longs for her coming, although [illegible]im she brings no food. Yet will he speak to this [illegible] when she comes no word beyond commonplace, [illegible]aps no word at all. He will stand abashed before [illegible], when he has stalked down the length of the lea

field after her father shall have dined and lit his pipe, and will talk to him of the building stone, of which he has talked every dinner-hour of the summer, till the maid is weary of it. At length, she will lift her pitcher and hie away. Perhaps she saucily blinks at the lad with those soft eyes of blue ere she departs.

It is Saturday night, and the setting sun is gilding for a fleeting half hour the moorland croft. The divots of the cottage-roof glow purple in the fainting beams, which afar off on the mountain peaks pour crimson light, as if the sun shed rays of blood. Out away over the level muir there seems infinite peace, for nought is there afoot to disturb the wakeful curlew. Near at hand, the hoarse landrail croaks of his thirst and love in the green rigs, and the cottager's cow comes lazily lowing to its wonted repose in the byre. And the young clacher stands by the cottage gable in the fading light, declaring "It's a gran' nicht." Ever so often he says it, yet he feels its grandeur not at all, for the presence of something grander or better, I suppose—the maiden, Kirsty Grant. Does he whisper somethings of her betterness, I wonder, while th lingers? Not at all. His only communication i important fact, "It's a gran' nicht." Yet surel has come miles out of his homeward way to proclai for he cannot have come for the cakes and tea herring with which he has been regaled by the crofter, who now by the firelight is painfully sha himself, which it were deadly sin to do on the morr

He would linger, blessed in her presence, but the closing day warns him to be gone. It will be midnight before he can reach his village home. Yet was it sweet to linger. "It's a vera gran' nicht, but I maun haist awa'. Mither 'ill be wunnerin'," said he.

"'Deed, ye'll hae tae draw yer feet gey fast tae win hame afore the Sabbath; sae e'en be steppin'," she answered coolly.

"It's gran'!" said he; "I wish ilka Saiturday nicht war lik' this ane."

"Wi' ye, Saiturday nicht shud maist be lik' Sunday morn, if ye bevil it richt," said she, with a toss of her head; for she rightly guessed that somewhat of the lad's pleasure was referable to herself. "I maun shut up the coo."

"Good nicht," said he.

"Good nicht," said she, disappearing in the byre.

He stepped away into the muirland, making for home. "Isn't she smairt!" said he to himself; [illegible]an! isn't she smairt! Said she, 'Saiturday nicht [illegible]ye be wi' ye lik' Sunday morn, if ye bevilled it [illegible] Wus it na a hint for me? Man, I wish I [illegible]ik oot till her."

[illegible] meditations were disturbed by the barking [illegible]og in front of him, but in the gloaming [illegible]ld not see who approached. By-and-by the [illegible]of a man came out of the mirky light, just [illegible]pon him. "Hullo!" "Hullo!" and the men [illegible]nd looked hard at each other, and passed

on. He who thus was going towards the crofter's cottage was our old acquaintance, Tom Murison, now a tall and powerful man; and each knew the other as thus they met; and they parted, you see, without greeting. A sore pang came to the heart of William Bain. He did not doubt that Tom was bound for the cottage. "Whaur else cud he be wannerin' here-awa'?"

There was no denying it; our lad, now in his twenty-first year, was in love, as lads shall ever be. Indeed, to himself he did not deny it. The maiden also, not displeased, saw somewhat of his love, but deemed it an embryotic affection, scarcely vivified, certainly slow of development and very hesitant. I do not know that any one else thought of it. The loves or hates of this clacher could matter little to the world around. Yet for him now this love was only pain, "grand" as the evening had been. Now, in the darkness, he felt all the hollowness of his pleasure, because, for certain, Tom Murison was going, just then, to visit the cott[illegible] of old Grant.

But, if our friend was in love, why did he [illegible] the hint, and "bevil the matter rightly?" W[illegible] he fret because another may seek what he will [illegible] Well, life is generally a strange muddle. K[illegible] he was very much in love with two women— Grant, as you rightly guess;—and the second mother. Yes, his mother. I am not ashamed it; and he loved her quietly, deeply, enduringl[illegible]

love of her was his supreme law. While his rebellious heart and nature went straying after this muirland beauty, he held it no less than treason to that love of his mother.

Was this a phenomenon inexplicable, that filial affection should conflict with and control the arbitrary, all-ruling power of virile love? I do not think so, do not wonder at it at all. If you look back to his past life, from that agonised cry in the hen-house onward, you will see ample grounds for an allegiance as sacred as humanity may be bound by, which he could never forget, never ignore. But could he not love them both? Indeed, he did so; but it was not the point of possibility which made any difficulty. It was his consciousness of the incompatibility of the two loves that troubled him and made him shrink from the avowal of the shorter lived of the two. Something also must be attributed to his special nature as well as to his special circumstances. He was sensitive. His [illegible]f companion, confidante of his inner thoughts [illegible]eelings, was that mother, whose love and care [illegible]e household bread of his poor inner life. Was "Wullie" still, to own to her that he de[illegible]draw a strange love nearer to him than his [illegible]'s love could reach? Was he to say he was [illegible]fied with what had filled his life till now? [illegible] as was his love of Kirsty Grant, quite as strong [illegible]s conviction that it were sin and shame to hasten [illegible]edlock, to grieve his mother thereby. Well he

knew that she who so long had ruled the boy, who now sometimes arbitrarily was disposed to govern the young man, was nowise disposed to abdicate, must have sentiments strongly pronounced against his going "aifter the lasses, leastwise while she was spared tae haud afore him."

CHAPTER II.

I FEAR that to a poor man, indeed to most men, the possession of a sensitive constitution and lively intellect must be decided disadvantages. In a long life they may turn to good ends; but ever and anon in the course of life they betray or deceive right reason, confounding simple things, exaggerating difficulties, in many ways making life uncomfortable. Indeed, delicacy of sentiment and keen perception of obligations, which usually are concomitants of such nature, hamper a man seriously in his way thro the world, gravely detracting from his pleasu the good things of life, gravely adding to the of life's misery, which consists largely of sen outraged and duties unfulfilled. I fear my the clacher, while he toiled and grovelled his broken stones, suffered from these disturbing in this important business of his loves; that from came his abiding perplexity in regard to the l love and the straight way of duty.

You must note the conditions of his love of Kirsty Grant. This love was no summer day's growth, to be blasted by the chill frost that haunts our highlands, even on summer nights. It was rooted deep down in the long past; it was associated with those early days of hardship into which this girl had entered in the boy's evil hour with power and goodness, so as to imprint her image on his mind; to cause him, for all the long, long years of his cadgerhood, to feed his soul with secret thoughts of her; vague fancies, vivid dreams of her, until she had now become, in some sort, to the soul of this poor dyke-builder what the vivid greenery of ivy is to the forest tree which it embraces, a source of beauty, graceful and picturesque, but not the less a source of danger and decay.

Although he did work manfully, although his mother and money and the many things of life had strong hold of him, this love of his was not such as hard work, or aught else, could supplant or kill. Indeed, he never thought to supplant or put it from him. He felt [illegible]hing but pleasure in it, the secret joy of his toil-[illegible]life, save when thought arose of home and mother, [illegible] his ears to tingle and his cheeks to blush. [illegible]ought he would put away, vowing always and [illegible] be dutiful. And he could have gone on for [illegible]I am sure, rejoicing secretly in his dreams, [illegible] now and again in the maiden's presence, seek-[illegible]o further development of love. But that Tom [illegible]on going to the cottage, travelling from afar to

the cottage that Saturday night so late, that quickened his love, I tell you, quickened it with fear and pain.

"Tom Murison will be courtin' her, an' may be I'll no win her! May be I *canna* win her," was the outcome of his painful thinking. Only that; and ever and again he said it, I cannot tell how often; and although the words embodied much feeling, his feeling found expression chiefly in his tones. "May be I canna win her!" He said it fifty times on his homeward way through the muirland, alone, in the soft sultry air of the summer night; and still the words were uppermost with him, when he stood on the cottage floor, listening to the querulous plaint of his mother. "Whaur ever bidit ye sae late? It's the Lord's day's morn! Whaur can the blissin' be o' it?"

The same thoughts and words haunted him all through the Sunday, too, especially during the long sermon. Usually in that weary hour he slept, as many hard-working people do, but to-day fear kept him awake—fear and fancy combined. He could think of nothing but Tom Murison going to the cottage of his beloved, had seen him going. "He maun be vera far them whan he'd gang at sic a hoor!"

All day Monday, too, at his labour, he mus changeless, grievous meditation of it, resol least to ask if "it wur tae them Tom Muriso o' Saiturday nicht." But when the girl ca two, his resolution to speak to her stuck i

throat. He did not venture to approach her, and persisted in his work all through the dinner hour. When, however, at six, her father, sisting labour for the day, passed the clacher still toiling, the latter raised himself and spoke. With a great gulp he said, "Wus yon Tom Murison I met gaein' the heather Saiturday nicht?"

"Ay, it wus jist him," said old Grant. "Puir chiel! He cam' fifteen mile tae see us aifter his hirsel bieldit. Ye ken he wus a frien' a bit oot-frae ma wife that's gane, an' I dinna ken but he lik's tae see ma lassie. That's their ain maitter hooe'er."

Bain struck fiercely with his hammer at the stone which he had been trimming, and lifted not head or voice in reply.

It was sore to find his day-dreams melting into the thin air, which alone composed them. Sore to find his cherished hopes of the future, vaguely as he had built his hopes, toppling down a baseless fabric. Sore and sad it was to find that not only did Tom Murison come [illegible]een him and his visions, but that his allegiance to [illegible]other, his first, chief duty of life, made those visions beyond his power to realise, by act or [illegible]f his, visions perhaps wrongful in their nature. [illegible]l all this was to feel also enervated; the arm the blow aimless, the work joyless; heart sore, jumbled, life unsatisfactory wholly. "What e'er dae!" "What e'er's tae be dune?"

[illegible]hat boots it although cried aloud never so often to

the dull stones he handled? With those confounded notions of duty that beset him, the chances are that nothing will be done.

But the days slip away, and again it is Saturday evening. "Wull ye cam' aist tae the craft an' git a dish o' tea, William?" asked old Grant.

God knows that last Saturday night has given the lad unrest enough, yet he cannot refuse the invitation. He went with the old man when they stayed work for the week. Kirsty received them with the bright smiles she was wont to wear; feasted them with tea and hot scones, butter, cheese, and odorous crowdie. And when they had eaten and were satisfied, they still sat at the cottage "board," and talked of the world around them. And Kirsty spoke of her late visitor of the previous Saturday night.

"Tam is a kind o' cousin. He's a shepherd awa ower at Bantyre, but some o' his folk are still down by Howe, an' he cam' till's an' bidit till the forenoon kirk."

William Bain could not speak of Tom Murison, but he had "heerd tell that twa-three mile o' the co road wus tae be dykit. He wus thinkin' o' pit for 't?"

"Gudeness!" said Kirsty, "ye'll mak a h siller! Ye'll be rich an' but a laddie! Ye gi big jobs gaein'! I wish Tam, puir chiel! haed y o' money-makin'."

"It's may be as weel wi' masel'," he was te to say.

"It's, nae doot, better wi' ye! but Tam's a glaiket craitar! He canna keep his bawbee. He canna bide in ae plaice scairce a towmonth. He's spaikin' o' shiftin' again at the Mairtmas. He's o' the rollin' stane kind!"

The heart of William Bain rejoiced within him, for these were not the words or views of a lass that loved Tom Murison. Love could not be clear-sighted like that, he thought. But in ignorance he thought it certainly, for love may see how blemished is the life of the loved one, and love him still, hoping that all things, even impossible things, may be wrought of and through the love. Nay, more; if he had been as sharp a fellow as he accounted himself, he might have thought that Miss Kirsty protested too much.

So, after his week of dire perplexity, this secret lover of the maiden was encouraged to dreams and visions again, and was comforted while he "bidit his time," which, in reality, was his mother's time, you know. And love takes firmer hold of him as he often [illegible] his beauty. She is ever so frank, so encouraging, [illegible]vable, that in his soul he adores her. There [illegible]ing admirable in womankind save her—and his [illegible].

[illegible] days rolled on into early August, when flying [illegible]'s warned old Grant that it was full time that [illegible] peat-stack was biggit," for in the pressure of [illegible]yke-building he had delayed it. He was absent

for a week from the fencing, "making and mending the stack." Then William Bain knew somewhat the hold which this girl had of him, for it seemed as if the first afternoon of her absence would never pass away; and when, at nightfall, he went to the cottage where he slept, he was full of unrest, because he had not seen her. When he lay down, "he didna ken whether heels or heid war uppermaist," as he himself would say. And the Saturday night found him at Grant's croft, to ask, of course, "Hoo cam' they on?"

The old man was sitting at the fireside, well tired with his week of peats, nightcap on head and "bauchels" on feet, laid by for an evening of slumberous comfort at the fireside till it should be time "for the books." He roused up at the entry of the clacher, and their mutual inquiries as to progress were satisfactory. "But," said the father, "ye can see the stack for yersel'. It's shaim for me tae hae droppit! There's a while o' daylicht yet." Kirsty took up her milking-pail and her three-legged stool. She gave th[illegible] lad a glance of her bright eyes, eyes which glo[illegible] and flashed in the blaze of the peat fire in the tw[illegible] room, such a glance as went "dirlin'" to hi[illegible] with a stound, and incontinently she went ou[illegible] could not have resisted that glance, although [illegible] had been reason for his tarrying to converse [illegible] old Grant. After a minute's pause, he followed [illegible] but when he got out into the twilight, she was [illegible] ing her cow, in the byre, of course. He ha[illegible]

courage to follow her there. Perhaps his reason was to blame.

Although his soul was longing to be beside her, he could not seek her in the byre—his mother's face and figure rose up to intercept him. Therefore he stayed without by the peat stack, and went round and round it, admiring it vastly, no doubt; and, by-and-by, the maiden stood beside him, carrying her milk-pail and stool. She stood but only for an instant, to say testily, "Shurely ye hae judged it fairly, Maister Bain!" and passed into the house forthwith. And I do not wonder at her testiness, for even I have no patience with the meritorious conduct of this loving fellow, who could fail those eyes which had demanded his escort, could stand out in the twilight, dim and chill, while he might have rejoiced in their warmth.

I do not wonder that she scarcely bade him good-night, at least spoke so cold and dryly that he went away bruised and pained, even while his heart was [illegible]aping within him because he guessed that she had [illegible] thought to win him.

[illegible]when her father returned again to the dyke-[illegible], and again she brought him his dinner as [illegible]he indignant maiden let the lad see she [illegible]t seeking him. As soon as her father had [illegible]is food and taken out his old pipe from his [illegible]oat-pocket, while the clacher, coming towards [illegible] was yet afar off, she lifted her pitcher, and went [illegible]ht away. This was sore treatment; but day after [illegible]he did it, till his heart was sick.

Prompted by his longings, he one day went round by the corn-land, and lingered at the gate by which she must leave the field, waiting there to meet her. While he waited, he knew that his waiting was mere folly so long as his voice refrained from words of love. But what could he do? What would you have him to do, knowing all his case?

When they met, he could only say to her with affected indifference, "It's braw wether."

"Ay," said she, "hairst 'll sune be upon us. Haist ye wi' yer dyke!" and she passed him in the field gate without glance or smile, as she went her way. He, in the activity of thought induced by the compression of his passion, must interpret her simple words into a declaration of her wish to see him no more. When this dyke was finished, his time for tarrying in the hill country must come to an end.

He is feverish and full of disquiet. He is at work from daybreak till late in the gloaming, but somehow his work does not advance as it used to do; the shor coming in his week's work may be measured by y for his pauses to sigh and in aimless thou frequent. The coldness of the maiden, which says to him, "I dinna care," fills him wit and with distress. His stones will not splinter ought to do, will not lie flat and squarely; som he must undo the work of an hour. There is no sure in the toil, no satisfaction in its expected gains. he works on, working even through the dinner ho

One bright day as he toiled thus, with no brightness at all in him, the maiden "Kirsty" stood inside his fence facing him. "Man, clacher," said she, "ye're well namit; but ye're silly tae wark sae eident. The warl' 's nae a' dykes, man! Ye'll turn intill a stane 'fore lang. See, man, there's skippie for ye! Ketch me gin ye can, lad!" And she slapped his shoulder with her hand, and fled towards her father. What could he do but follow her, leap his fence and dash along the lea field in keen pursuit? But she had a fair start of him, and ere he overtook her, she was set down beside her parent, flushed and laughing, crying, "Parley, lad!" as he came to her side, and would have returned the "skip-stroke." "Sit down, ye ne'erest!" said she. "Cam' here, an' spaik tae folk!" And with beating heart he sat down by her side.

She spoke to him lightly of his laborious way. "For a week ye didna spaik or speir at us. Yer sowl is a' [illegible]kes, dykes! Dae ye think ye'll win Heiven or ony[illegible]thing by sic wark, man? I'm wae for ye, tylin' [illegible]in' lik' the slave!"

[illegible]ied to excuse himself. The day was shorten[illegible]l he must get through the job; but faint[illegible] was the excuse, self-flouted the excuser. [illegible]hile he looked into her beaming face and [illegible]ughing, yet earnest, he could have flung his [illegible]around her neck and confessed the truth, that [illegible] and work were nought without her, that dark[illegible]nd confusion fell on him when she was turned

from him, that light and power to work and comfort in his work were his only in the light of her smiles. Circumstances and his notions of duty restrained him.

The days sped on till August was ended, and September breezes, premonitory of gales equinoctial, waved the plumed and yellow barley with gleamy undulations, like tiny wavelets of a summer lake, and warned the upland crofter that his harvest must begin. Wonder of wonders! William Bain will cease dyke-building for a day, will lose a day's earnings that he may help his friend, old Grant, in the winning of his corn.

At half-past five in the autumn morning, old Grant and William Bain shook hands, before the first beams of sunlight were cast athwart the muirland. "Com' awa', com' awa'! Kirsty haes a bit and a het sup for ye afore wark begins. Jist step ben." And there indeed was Kirsty, fresh from her morning ablutions, attired in a white bodice, which hung loosely over her sta[illegible] Her petticoat, of blue and brown bars, shor[illegible] dapper, was a telling garment; and she was a[illegible] bright lass truly, quite as he thought her. S[illegible] him a hot cake and hot cup of tea. [illegible] in high spirits, and full of gay words an[illegible] And when he was going out, being both [illegible] trance, she flung open the door of a closet, [illegible] "See, if ye're mindit tae pit aff yer coat, f[illegible] thoughtit the day will be het, e'en throw it in th[illegible] that's ma sleepin'-plaice." He was ready to d[illegible]

he was bid, and he entered with her, and put off his coat, and laid it on the back of a chair. He saw the cosy bed, where lately she had nestled, just as she had left it, and—he went out abruptly, saying, "I maun tak' a luik o' the rigs afore we begin."

William Bain was scythesman, to be relieved at times by old Grant. Kirsty and a girl, her cousin Kate, gathered the swaythe into sheaves and made bands for the sheaves, which old Grant bound up and set in stooks. In the freshness of the dewy morn they set vigorously to work; and when the sun, clearing the heights in the east, came out in full strength, he found them warm but persistent. And the heat, you know, was not all of labour or of sunshine, for William Bain was toiling not in his own strength merely, but in the strength of his love, which gave keenness to his scythe, strength to his arm, and persistence to his work. He would not suffer the old man to relieve him. The morning's interview had set him on edge. Woe is me for his comfort! Kirsty Grant, as she follows him, is thinking, "He'll hae nane but his mither!"

At nine they rested for breakfast; and going to the cottage, whither the girls preceded the men, they were quickly presented with abundant porridge, scones, cakes, and eggs, with accessories from the dairy. When they had all well eaten of these good things, and the old man had smoked a pipe at the fireside, then he spoke. "I áye acknowledge the Lord roun' the family altar, me an' mine, an' the stranger wi'in ma gates;"

and he called for "the books," and he read and he prayed. Then again he lit his pipe and went forth. His friend, the clacher, tarried a while with the lasses. Do you find fault with him for it? Do you say, "Abominable, just after worship?" Why, I believe it would be well that religion had more to do with the love daffing of our young folk. But this is a very safe lad, I am sure. While his heart is flaming like a pent-up furnace, he will show it in no act of daffing, in no word of endearment; he will simply sit enchanted while the girls wash up the dishes.

By night he was fatigued, for the labour was unwonted. So when he won to the head-rig at six o'clock, he was glad to fling down his scythe, and to throw himself also on the purple heather that bloomed just outside the corn-land, while the lasses and old Grant made up the last sheaves. And while he lay there, the girls set on him at unawares, and tried to bind him with corn-bands. They kept him down on the heather, and they tumbled over him in the struggle, and one of them he held—which think you? till the other, with gentle violence and much laughter, released her from his grasp. The father looked on during this daft end of a hard day, saying, "Cummers, dinna be mensless! mind yer mainners!" Surely it was full reward for a day's toil, thus to have his idol in his arms.

Secrecy is a bad thing, ever fruitful in pain. Yet it is difficult to break the silence with which too often

love is compassed. When William returned home next Saturday night to the village and his mother, he did not mention the fact that he had given his old comrade, the dyke-builder, a day in his harvesting. But, by-and-by, in the next week, one of the Widow's old friends of the old years when she used to buy eggs in the hill country, chanced to visit her, and told her the story in words which conveyed more than the truth. "Yer brave clacher, woman, lies hard doun tae auld Grant's craft. Weel, she' a smairt, sensible, weel-bein' lass is Grant's lassie, an' I dinna wunner at it a bit. He gied them a lang hairst day's wark a se'ennicht yestreen, an' guid entertainment he'd get, for auld Grant's a kindly craitar." So ran the gossip, and hot and sharply to the mother's heart it ran. What, does she not know her lad aright yet?

You will admit that this man's life had been and was still a hard one, for body and soul of him were full of activities, and both had been fully worked. At first, in the intervals of his wandering and cadgering, when he rested and when he dreamed, his head was filled with thoughts of eggs and rabbits' skins, and their values. Then came the time of heavier labour, when such intervals were filled with stones and dykes, and lineal yards and rates per yard, and riches of payment. Even then, in the mass and press of such materialistic conceptions, the indefinite thought of this girl and love came now and ever again to assert a certain influence. Now, while he worked and while he rested, ever was love and this

girl the one thing of his brain. His hands plodded away at the stones, he handled hammer and plummet; but Kirsty Grant was with him and in him all the while—nought but she. In despite of his reason she held possession of him, that reason which bore recollection of his duty to home and mother and left him tongue-tied in his love. Thus he had toil of body, of mind much confusion. Even Sunday, the church day, brought no mitigation of his unrest. He will even dream of her when he drops asleep in church, although against that he will henceforth be very watchful; for did he not last Sunday awake suddenly, in the time of sermon, dreaming of that day of harvesting? Was he not covered with frightful confusion, because he thought that, in awaking, he had called out "Kirsty!"

On the Sunday after his mother had heard of his love of this hill girl, he felt his confusion more confounded, the weight of his secret more intolerable, and plainly the matter was approaching a crisis of some sort. He must do something. He knew not what he was to do. He was filled with a confused desperation. Then it was, at dinner-time, that his mother, in her straightforward way, went into the matter. "Mrs. Jaik, fra Howe, wus here on Friday, an' said she, 'Yer sone wus hairstin' an' faistin' at auld Grant's, an' jinkin' wi' his dochter, and lies hard till her.' Are ye courtin' there, Willie?"

How small he felt himself before his mother! How

he could have sneaked away from this interrogation! Fortunately he could not get away without replying, although he was dumbfoundered at the first.

"Did she spaik true?" again inquired the mother.

"It wus nae muckle lee," he answered with a great gulp.

There was a pause, after which the woman spoke again sharply and bitterly. "Laddie, ye're far wrang tae leed her upo' the ice; an' I dinna ken what ye mean at a'."

He rose from his half-eaten dinner, and sat down at the fireside out of sight of his mother at the table. His voice was thick with emotion, but he said steadily, "I mean naething but honest by her. She's a guid an' a clever lass, an' I loe her, mither! She's ower guid an' clever for me!" There it was all out, and the mother might think of it what she liked. He scarcely knew what he said.

She took it as a dire providence that her son's love was to be snatched from her. That was her point of view, and for a while she sat at the table motionless. Then she also got up and turned to the fire-side, and she was weeping downright. "Noo, mither!" said the lad. "What for will ye greet? Is there oucht wrang i' the maitter?"

"Am no sayin' there is. It's the waey o' the warld! Sune as hatched the chicks forsaik the nest! What for am I grievin'?"

"Am no gaein' tae forsaik ye! wha spaik o' forsakin' ye?"

"Nane. It's ma ain hairt tells me o' it, an' warns me."

"Then, mither, it's no the same hairt as syn' ye haid. Ye trusted me aye till noo!"

"Are ye no tellin' 't yersel', Willie? Och, och!"

He got up, for he was touched in spirit a little, because it seemed that his mother was unwilling to be reasonable, would not look at the matter calmly. "Mither, I'm no denyin', when ye ask me, but I lo'e the lass. I lo'e her maist as ye, better nor masel', but I ne'er said 'luve' till her."

"Then, what waey is't ye're courtin'?" asked the mother through her tears.

"'Deed an' truth, I dinna ken that am courtin' raisonable at a'! I ne'er said till her 'Fair fa' ye!' Am sure she thinks am nae courtin'. Am *nae* courtin', I say, mither!" He breathed a long sigh, and the tears were in his eyes as he went on. "But my hairt loups whan I see her e'en far awa', an' I grow silly an' sick, an' contentit an' warm o' hairt whan she's by han'; and am distraited when she's gane awa'; an' am downricht in luve wi' her, I ken, mither! But ye're the first that kens o' it frae me." He sat down again on his chair with a thud. And his words had effect on his mother.

"Ye war aye a good son, Willie," she said.

"Am thinkin' that same," said he somewhat hardly. "[illegible]no mindit to be oucht ither i' the comin' time; [illegible]t for no shudn't I hae a sweethairt?"

"[illegible]o contrairin' ye," said the woman.

There the subject dropped; but at night, before he went to bed, she spoke of the matter again, more reasonably this time. "Ye haena spok' o' luve tae the lass Grant, Willie?"

"No' me."

"Weel, then, am mindit tae see her wi' ma ain een—nae tae mak' luve till her for ye, but till I see that she's warth ma laddie. Whan the tataes is lifted, and twa-three bits o' wark oot o' han', I'll win tae see her; or she'll cam' tae me here. The Hallowmaes fair 'ill bring her tae the town whatever."

"God bless ye, mither!" said the lad, going off to bed and to dream.

To sleep and to dream, to wake to labour and still to dream of the coming fruition of his love, for he feared not his mother's inspection of the girl. He was at peace, secure of the girl's disposition towards him; and there was no doubt that she had shown him as much partiality as modest maid might show. So he slept and laboured and dreamed; and in early October that dyke at the Newlands of Howe was finished, and he began upon the heavy job on the county road, and was transplanted from the enchanted neighbourhood, where the long summer days had been made glad by Kirsty. It would have been an unsupportable affliction to have been severed from her a bare month before. Now he did not feel it greatly, for was not the time coming quickly when he could speak to her of his love, ask her and claim her for his own?

As he toiled away by the roadside cheerfully, almost gaily, he repeatedly saw Tom Murison pass along. He thought nought of Tom Murison or any other man. One nymph far away at that hill croft alone he thought of. But one day Tom stopped and sought speech of him. "I hae ta'en on tae be shepherd at the Braefut. Pairt o' the fee is the keep o' a score o' ewes; an' I was spaikin' tae Hugh Grant aboot it, for the price o' the pack 'ill be tae paey tae the waygaein' man, an' I lack siller. Grant is vera frien'ly, an' he'll sign a bill for the money, an' bade me speir if ye'd sign wi' him, that sae be we get the money oot o' the bank. It will muckle obleege us a'."

"I dinna ken, I dinna understand aboot beells; I dinna ken indeed," said the perplexed clacher—perplexed, because, while he would have nought to do with the affairs of this Tom Murison on his own account, the form of somebody came up at the name of Grant, who had said indeed that this was a rolling stone, but who now seemed coupled with this request through her father. For her sake he would risk much, concern himself much; so he ended his "dinna kens" by saying, "As I hae noucht understandin' o' it, I'll gae up tae see Mr. Grant, an' settle the maitter wi' him. Ye'll no need siller ere the term?" Tom thanked him and went his way.

His mother thought that he would be foolish indeed to risk any portion of his hardly won money with a

man unknown to him. For himself, he had no interest in this Tom Murison—had, indeed, some little dislike of him. Filled, however, with his dreams of that love so soon to be gratified with open manifestation, he was full of kindly feeling towards all men. He would see old Grant, and hear what he had to say, and, if possible, he would avoid involvement, remembering the words of the wise man regarding him that becomes surety for his friend. But he felt that to win that "far out" cousin of Tom's, he must impledge not only money, if it was asked, but life and all; yet was he very confident of his winning her. In consequence of this matter of the bill, however, which was not at all to her liking, his mother postponed her visit to the hills from day to day and week after week, till at last October was drawing to a close. Then she said it would be time enough to see the girl on the market day; and William resolved, that on the Saturday preceding the fair, he should go to see the Grants. "I'll ask the lassie to ca' on ye, an' talk tae her faither o' that beell." She did not oppose him.

On the night preceding that Saturday he slept but little. How could he, with all those loves and hopes and dreams of his? Long before daylight he was afoot, feverishly eager to be gone. It was provoking how slowly his mother went about the porridge-making, but wonderful how little porridge he ate when it was made. He had never shaved with razor so dull; his own eagerness had taken its edge, I suppose. At

last, with the first streaks of light, he started, arrayed all in his best, being in that state a man by no means unpresentable. He climbed the Braefoot brae, and set out on the level muirland beyond it, which was already soft with autumnal showers. The wet heath quickly took the sheen off his boots, and wetted the feet of his trousers. What of that? He walked briskly forward, his inclination largely outstepping his paces.

It was still early of the day when he drew near to "the elf-knowe" in the long plain of heather; and approaching it on the opposite side, there came towards him two women. Gleefully they came on, for he could hear the ring of their merry laughter while yet they were too far off for recognition. They were dressed too, evidently for a journey to the village. And as he approached them, he was sure he knew them, and was certainly right. They were Kirsty Grant and her cousin Kate. He was well-nigh speechless. What, was he to lose the reward of his walk, the great pleasure which had kept him awake all night? Was she not to be with him for these few hours, as he had planned?

They met, and he told them whither he was bound—"tae see them weel aifter the hairst, an' tae settle that maitter o' Tam Murison's."

"Hoo kind o' ye!" said Kirsty.

"Whaur are ye boun' for?" he asked.

"We're gaein' till the Kirktown."

"Hoot! cam' back hame. I hae some claivers for

ye; an' a message frae ma mither. Ye'll be at the town on the market day whate'er."

No, Kirsty was not to be at the fair. She must go on to the village; and cousin Kate explained all in a blunt speech. "Ye'll no be kennin' that Kirsty's tae be mairried at the term. 'Deed, I thoucht ye wad come forrit yersel' for her. But she's contrackit noo, an' the cries 'll be oot the morn."

CHAPTER III.

Cousin Kate explained it all, and it was a terrible revelation truly. Can you fancy the noise of many waters, sound of widespread rush and flow, in the ears of a drowning man? A hoarser, dreader rush and surge of misery and evil rang into the soul of poor William Bain, engulfed in the waters of sad fate. "Kirsty's tae be mairried at the term"—"contrackit noo"—"the cries 'll be up the morn." He could not comprehend it at the first, even while he felt himself plunging, sinking in an abyss of woe, in the swirl of a whirlpool of confused despair that swept him about and sucked him down, ever down, from the light of life. Giddiness and faintness were upon him, and, scarcely conscious, he sat down, sank down in the wet heather. "Are ye no weel, clacher?" "Are ye no weel, Willie?" asked the girls, seeing his face pale and his lip quiver. "Ye're no weel, surely?"

"Am no weel," was all he could reply.

They came to him and put their hands on him kindly, looking anxiously, perhaps tenderly, into his face, asking if there was aught they could do for him. He sat speechless, he felt his cap heavy, as if it were compressing his brain. He took it off, and let the cold hill breeze blow his hair about, yet he felt no relief. "Ye're sair ta'en, lad! Whaur is't ye feel bad?" Many minutes they stood questioning him, sympathising with him, guessing not at all at the real seat of his malady. "We'll gae back wi' him, Kate; it's no aboun a mile. Lat's see him safe tae ma faither."

Then first he found words, for he would fain be alone, fully to see and comprehend this evil. "Am better, better noo. Gang forrit. Mony thanks tae ye baith. I'll win tae yer faither's o' masel'." He was distinct in this, and said it again to their repeated offer. Then, with many words of sympathy, the lasses left him on the muir alone.

It was an astounding blow which thus unexpectedly had fallen on him, striking him on head and heart, crushing both, when both were fullest of the sense of security. Alone on the muir, he sat there, in the cold and wet, while the sun mounted high towards noon. Then an old man, an acquaintance, came along and hailed him, asking why he rested there; and, covering his sorrow, he said he was ill. The man stayed with him and talked with him and helped him on his way—almost compelled him to move on, telling him

all the while of the "contrackin' at auld Grant's." Kirsty, the daughter, was plighted and betrothed to Tom Murison, the shepherd.

The man left him at the cart shed, which stood at the end of the long row of turf-roofed cottages, that were the old dyke-builder's dwelling and byre and stable and garner; and in the cart-shed the lad remained for hours, seated on a cart-shaft, motionless, I believe, also without thought. It was a cold and raw day, and he had been greatly wetted upon the heath, but he felt it not. I do not know but the cold was good for him, a physical something to counteract his mental ailment, and helped him somewhat to the realisation of what had happened him. This he knew, that he alone was to blame for the loss of his heart's love. If he "had gane forrit;" if he had said that he loved her and would make her his own, he did not doubt that his she would have been. But he had tarried, he had been voiceless, stifled his voice while bone and marrow of him would have cried out of his thrilling love. It was just the old story, while he tarried another had stepped in before him. He had tarried, lo! so many years.

Now he could see no remedy, no escape from the disaster which his miserable, unmanly tarrying had involved. For he knew the true nature of the lass, that although she could have welcomed his wooing while she stood unpledged to another man, now wooed and pledged she would keep her troth. One thing

only could he definitely resolve on: as his fate came of his own procrastination, so also must the suffering be—all his. Rudely thought out, no doubt, this was—perhaps the instincts of his nature had more to do with it than thought—but he alone must suffer, and to that end he must suffer in silence. Nay, more; he would sign that bill. If he could do aught to smooth the girl's path of life, in the spirit of love he would do it, let his mother say what she would.

At length, old Grant came upon him in the shed. "Ho, friend, ye here! Am blythe tae see ye. Pity it was nae forty-aucht hoors syn', an' we'd hae ye at oor bit merry-makin', man." Yes, pity it was not, even then there might still have been hope. "Com' awa', man. What for are ye loitran' there, an' me a' ma lane by the ingle cheek?"

Thus the old man led him into the cottage; and in the cottage, without words, he signed a bill for twenty-five pounds, the price of the pack of sheep. Grant would have him drink a dram, but he would not.

"What, no drink the young-fowk's health? It's the whisky o' the contrack!" No, he had fallen ill on his way through the moss, and he turned against the whisky. His heart was too full, his mind too disturbed just then, to wish for another the happiness he had missed. He started homeward again forthwith. The day was short, you know. Again, on the muir, he met the girl of his dreams, and now he was calmer, was able to say, "God bless ye, Kirsty, whaesaever's wife ye be!" But he

said it so choked with emotion, that he knew he betrayed himself, and abruptly he left them and sped away.

He threw himself down on the chair at the fireside, with hollow eye and face cadaverous. "Mak' ma bed, mither, for am sair hurtit."

"Hurtit, Willie! What ails ye? Whate'er haes com' tae ma laddie? *Whaur* are ye hurtit, ma son?"

With tears unconcealed and unrestrained, he told how his love was lost and his life made worthless. "I'll lie down, mither. I dinna mind if it be tae dee." And he lay down with heavy despair upon him, incapable of calm thought, feeling nothing, save a dead weight on his chest, a vague enlargement of his head, which precluded thought. He did not eat, he could not eat. He did not sleep, or, if sleep came to him, it was broken by such frequent starts, such dreams of horror, that it was worse than no sleep, and left him more jaded, with more sense of misery than before. Thus for days he lay. The Hallowmas fair came round, and he was still in bed.

Old Grant came to the door on the market day. He desired to see the clacher, to invite him and his mother to the marriage. But by this time the widow had got into low spirits and was full of anxiety about the condition of her son. She said that her lad would not be able to go to any wedding against the term day; she even hinted her fear that death might claim him before then; and she was weeping, you may

be sure. The man went away distressed for the illness of his friend. He judged that "he was nigh some bad trubble on the Saiturday, he was sae distracktit and fill o' peaghin'."

Still another visitor sought him, that fresh-hearted lass, cousin Kate. The widow met her at the door, and would coldly have sent her away. But Kate said, "Oh, my woman! let me in, for am lik' tae brak' ma hairt! Heerd ye e'er tell o' twa sic misfort'nate craitars? Kirsty's nigh as bad as him ever since they pairtet on the muir! But it's nae a thing for speech, ye ken. She greets noo and then ilka day, but ye see she daurna spaik, 'though her heart's lik' tae burst, I ken. What will become o' them? Am her cousin."

Then the widow gladly received her—but "What was tae be dune?"

"Weel, ye see, Mrs. Bain, I kent a' the year, ay, lang syn', that Kirsty likit yer lad, and I jealoosed that his hairt wus on her; but, Lord, ye see, he wadna spaik, he was aye sae doose an' ceevil, an' naebody cud be sure what he meanit. An' mony a lad wus fond o' Kirsty, though she's ma cousin; but the misfortin is, that this Tam chiel cam' an' askit her, an', jist as maist lasses, she tak' the first that offered. She *is* sair aboot it the day, I ken!"

"Wad she brak' aff, think ye? I'd gang tae Howe on ma knees, if it gied life tae ma lad!"

"Am no thinkin' 't," said Kate sorrowfully; "am sure she winna be ony speckillation tae the pairish by

offbraikin' the banns. She'll no be kent i' the public for a jilt or a jaud. Na, Mrs. Bain, since Kirsty made her bed, she'll lie on't, though she dee neist week."

"Lord! Lord!" cried the widow in her anguish, "is there nae deliverance?" For her son was deadly ill, she feared, and told the girl, who, thus learning his sad case in its painful particularity, broke out into self-accusation.

"'Deed, I telt Kirsty that he ne'er wad wed, ne'er wad tak' ony wife tae plague ye. I telt her that ower often, am sure; and me misjudgin' the puir chap! God forgie me! I maun hae helpit tae twist them intae a' this meesry!"

There seemed no help for it now, now that he would neither eat nor lift his head. At first the mother was glad within herself that this love of her son was disappointed and broken off. But, when for days he rose not, ate not, for days lay as if he were not living man, then the hope that time would cure him began to leave her, and the fear of losing him began to fix itself in her soul. Dire fear! bringing back the memories of her husband's death-bed, bringing back, too, the memories of her son's boyhood, his unflinching effort, his willing obedience, his constant love of her. She felt that she, withal, was to blame, in that she had grudged her son this one desire of his heart, which now she could see was quite compatible with his continued filial love. She fell on her knees in the broad daylight, to entreat that this cup of her mingling

might be removed without her drinking of it, while hoarsely the din and uproar of the fair swept into and round about the cottage within which she knelt. Outcome of her prayer it was that she sent for Dr. Blake.

The doctor, learning the full history of the case, and sympathising with the patient, went to the relief of this heart disease with great delight, went to the patient lightly and gaily, rousing him with his cheery, musical voice and laugh, never used inappropriately. He ascertained, in the first place, what physical derangement there was, and relieved that. Physical derangement, indeed, had much to do with the dyke-builder's condition, for cold on the chill, damp heath had helped his mental perturbation to make him feverish, while want of food had caused sad debility. Then he fed him with a dainty morsel; thereafter set him to sleep. After that, he made him get up to eat, staying by him to talk and see him eat, talking sympathetically, but lightly, of his misadventure. Then, after a few days, when the workmen came, asking instructions regarding a bank of earth that had to be cut away, Dr. Blake drove out the ailing man to the spot, and detained him for many hours in the open air, drawing from him all the craft of dyke-building, setting him squarely on the old level of life again. He brought him home hungry and with fresh thoughts, and the son was restored to his mother and life again.

Restored, but not changed; simply strengthened to

bear the burden of his sorrow, to bear it manfully and to wade his way through life, as best he might, feeling the burden long life through. Heavily weighed the burden on him the night before the term day—that day which was finally to sever him from the hope of his one life-joy. He sat at the fire, thin, pale, and spiritless, saying he wished the doctor would look in, so that he might get to bed. He spoke not of the grief of which he was full. His mother looked at him with eyes blinded by her tears, for she knew his thoughts.

Suddenly in upon them, without knock or warning, rushed that cousin Kate. She was evidently under great excitement, evidently, too, she was not prepared to find the man at the fireside; and at first she could only fling her arms about, crying, "My, my, what are we a' tae come till?"

The clacher feebly stood up when she entered. Somewhat hardly the mother asked, "What's wrang wi' ye, lassie?"

"We're a' wrang! the warl' 's a' wrang! Here we cam' tae the weddin' the morn, an' me tae be the maid, an' the faist an' the drink an' the fowk a' raidy, an' here's the bridegroom haes fleed the countrae! A bonny fule's bridal we'll hae o' it! A bonny speckillation an' buzness we mak' o' it, I'm sure! What are we a' till come till?" and she sat down on a stool and began to cry.

William Bain could not comprehend it. I think his mother did, for she went on with her knitting,

quietly saying, "Except the Lord build the hoose, they labour i' vain wha build it."

In came Dr. Blake.

The doctor was very gay. You could perceive it in the ring of his mellow voice. "Eh, have you got a sweetheart, Bain? She's a braw lass! Are ye greetin' for him, lassie?" said he.

Mrs. Bain explained as far as she could. "I know all about it," said the doctor. "I came just to tell the story. Tom Murison is not to be married, and is not to be found. It is a strange story. You signed a bill for him, William?"

"I did," said the clacher faintly, for he had not told his mother.

"It has happened through that bill. Tom went with it to a bank at Inverwick, and the banker did not know you, and told him he must get another name to it, the name of some one known to him. 'Will James Moffat of the Braefut dae? He's ma maister?' That would do certainly; but Tom avoided the trouble of asking Mr. Moffat by simply writing his master's name on the back of the bill, in a dark room of a public-house. Then again he went to the bank. The banker was in his private room, and the bill was sent in. 'Bid the man come this way.' Tom went to the room door, and saw Moffat sitting with the banker. He turned and fled, and has not since been seen. But old Grant has had a note from him to day. He is off to America. Who knows what's to come about next?" said the

doctor, laughing. They could not laugh with him. "Puir Kirsty!" said cousin Kate; "she couldna spaik tae me, didna tell me the facks o' it, when she gaed aff hame back again wi' her faither i' the cairt." "Unless the Lord build the hoose," again quoted the widow, "they labour in vain wha build it."

You anticipate the end, do you,—that this man of stones had his life built level and squarely, well and firmly bound at the last? Well, it would be wrong in me to interrupt such pleasant forecastings, by telling how long it took them, both him and his Kirsty, to undo the errors which each had made in this serious matter of life-building—how long it was that she turned from the world her fair face, refusing to listen again to any man's tale of love. I am half in love with that cousin Kate myself! How she strove to remedy her share in the mistake that had been made, speaking comfort to our clacher when his dear one would not hearken to him. Least of all would I annoy you by insinuating that our Kirsty, certain of this man's attachment, most unreasonably prolonged her grief for a man so unworthy of her as he who had fled; thinking herself, I daresay, that she was sincere, while, as her cousin would say, it was only "the speckillation" of the matter that rankled in her bosom. It would be sheer waste of time and paper to tell you all that. I know what to tell you. The other day, I was with Blake in one of his professional drives. "What a fine place Bain has

made of this," said he; "he has two hundred acres under tillage, and as complete a steading as is in the county. Let us go and ask for him." It was the same piece of land on which the clacher had sweated and lain down on that harvest day, long, long ago; but, by dint of many years' hard labour, it is converted into a highly cultured farm, of spacious fields and complete enclosures, and the house is an excellent modern mansion, simple, moderate of size, but so full of comfort that it satisfies the eye and heart. You are so sure of the identity of Mrs. Bain that I will not tell you whom I saw when we called; nor about "the bairns." A life of honest labour and of honest love has won a meet recompense of material prosperity and domestic happiness.

THE DRESSMAKERS.

CHAPTER I.

IT is many years since Robert Stewart came to dwell among us. Previously he was a tenant in the Aird of Langrig, where he rented a holding of some eighty acres of arable land, at a rent of £55. The farm had some "outrun"—uncultivated land—attached to it, which greatly increased its value; and, although it had the disadvantage of being too large for cultivation by one pair of horses, and yet was too small fully to employ two, it was easily rented, and on the whole he sat comfortably in it. He was a large-framed and stout man, sanguine and active of temperament. He did the work of his farm with his own hands, helped by his sons, of whom there were two, and he so much interested himself in the affairs of the district and the private concerns of others, that his work was not uncommonly in arrear at seed-time or harvest. He was an intelligent man, well versed in country matters, and as his father had at one time been a messenger-at-arms, he had some smattering of legal knowledge,

and a turn for letter-writing and general advising. He greatly prided himself upon his legal knowledge and talents, and, in their exercise, had formed relations with certain lawyers at Inverwick, who were not the most scrupulous of their profession. To them he delighted to introduce such of his friends as thought themselves aggrieved. So distinguished was he for his readiness to interfere in this way, that, popularly, he was known as "Counsellor Stewart."

He was a widower; and besides the two sons who helped him in the farm, he had also two daughters. In his circumstances, his daughters might reasonably have been held to work—to fill the manure carts in spring, to thin the turnip-drills in summer, and to help in the harvest rigs in autumn; but he would not so treat them. No doubt, in early days, when not at school, they had tended the cattle, and later they had learned to milk the kye and make butter. But on their mother's death, when the eldest was sixteen, he committed to them the whole household work, with the care of the dairy and its produce, and would not have them in any way engage in out-work. They soon came to understand how narrow was their father's income, how little economical he was, and to what straits he was sometimes reduced on the approach of rent-day. Then it was that the elder, who had acquired some knowledge of dressmaking from her mother—perhaps inherited from her a taste for it—quietly began to do "white-seam" for the people of larger possessions in their neighbourhood, and by-and-

by to make up printed cotton frocks, and other pieces of dress, for the rustic population around her. At first the father knew not of this industrial effort, and the younger sister murmured a little, because thereby an undue share of the burden of domestic work and of the dairy business was thrown upon her. But when at the end of one hard week of work, promptly paid for on the Saturday evening, three half-crown pieces were exhibited as the reward of the effort, the murmurs were stilled, and the sympathy and aid of the junior enlisted in the sewing.

The name of the elder sister was Aileen; that of the younger Annabel. You must not be surprised at these names, although somewhat out of the common sort, for in the rough man their father there was not a little of a rude love of the beautiful, the untutored faculty of delighting in pleasant things. Therefore he had given his children pleasant names; and they were pleasant girls. At sixteen Aileen was a thoughtful little woman, careful about many things; a hard-working little woman too, who, knowing the beauty and merit of cleanliness and regularity, and the duties she owed to those around her, was wont to arise with the summer's sun, so that the family washing might betimes lie bleaching on the daisied green, or the butter-churning be completed, the family bread be baked, and other things be so ordered, that, when the men went out to the forenoon yoking, the day was at her own disposal. The after meals of the day were simple, and their preparation could be

attended to while she sewed in the kitchen. In all these duties the younger Annabel soon took a part and a pleasure, so that many mornings there were on which they could take to their seams even at six o'clock.

Aileen was small of stature, less considerably than the average size of woman, but lithe and graceful of figure; her face was oval, the mouth and chin well formed, and if the nose had been Grecian, she would altogether have been of classical beauty. As it was, she was a pretty little girl, ardent of temperament and keen of feeling, as you might see from the soft blue eyes and whole expression of her. Annabel, even at the immature age of fourteen, was larger than she, stronger of frame and constitution, dark-haired and black-eyed, with the promise of much handsomeness when her womanhood developed.

Such were the young girls who had charge of the little homestead at the Aird, who kept things orderly and clean for their father and brothers, were in all things pleasant and dutiful to father and brothers, and were, moreover, fired with the noble desire to help themselves with their needles, seeing that they were shut out from the ordinary modes of industry.

When the father came to know it, he was very indignant that "dochters o' his wad tak' on dressmaikin'. They haed enuch adae aboot the toun. He wadna bide the steerin' e'en o' sic a notion. Mantie-maikin', forsooth! They maun drop it." He had fault to find with the housekeeping in all possible ways that night, in evidence that there were things left undone through the

sewing, which ought to have had attention. It was quite in his way to scout such an effort as this, to shut his eyes against its scope and motive. Annabel said, "Faither, the hoos is quite the same as ever it was. Whaur's the stour, or ony dust? Tell us onything that's no in its plaice, or that's neglected oot o' raison, but dinna be misca'in' a' things this gait." Then he called her "a saucy gipsy," and sat down to smoke off his grumblings. Annabel was a saucy lass, I dare say, and perhaps, in consequence, was his favourite.

But next day when he was afield, Annabel came running to him. Three men were in the house, "sherra-officers," wanting him and money. Greatly downcast, he followed the maiden back to his domicile, for he had no money. Macfee, the officer, was collecting taxes: he wanted £1 10*s*. He was very civil to Mr. Stewart, but also very firm. "Ye see, Coonslar, thae taxes are lang in arrear, an' the collector haes paid them himsel', an' ma orders are positeeve tae distrain if ye dinna pay."

Counsellor Stewart was both angry and at his wits'-end. "I ocht to hae seen aboot it, Mr. Macfee, afore noo; but lat be till am i' the toun on Friday, an', o' ma word, I'll pay ye."

"That winna saitisfee ma instructions," said the officer.

And Stewart was feeling all the perplexity and confusion and disgrace of impecuniosity, when his daughter, Aileen, silently put the money into his hands.

"Sae ye'll nae wait till Friday, ye winna?" said the farmer, recovering his equanimity. "Ye'll no! Weel! here's yer siller. Gie me ma receipt, an' aff wi' ye. The king may com' i' the cadger's road, Mr. Macfee!"

I think that settled the question of Aileen's industry. Her father never alluded to it thereafter, and she pursued it openly.

And with experience her skill and taste and power of imitating such dresses as she saw increased greatly. So also did her reputation; and in the winter of the year that she was eighteen, she opened a sewing-class, to which came many young women from the adjacent braes, who not only paid her a fee of five shillings for the quarter's tuition, but by their work brought her no small gain. Thus, with much thrift and care and work, including much stitching, the girls climbed through their teens towards womanhood.

Yet life was not with them all care and stitchings. In Aileen there was much of that perfervid nature which, under favouring circumstances, will vent itself in poetic effusion. With her it broke out in the singing, no doubt in wild-note style, of our country's songs, and in the love of flowers, and all the pretty things in life and nature. The handsome, ample Annabel did not care to sing, liked lovable things, of course, but was slow of emotion. Aileen could be gay and grave by turns, as often and as incomprehensibly as spring day may be diversified. Annabel was ever equable. Such was the difference of their natures.

In the long bright nights of summer, in July, when the flood of work that set in on the payment of wages at Whitsunday had subsided, it was Aileen's delight to resort to the margin of the larch plantation, which stood a couple of hundred yards from their home, where, along the decayed turf mound that fenced "the planting" in its young days, grew the dwarf birch, the wild-briar rose, and the odorous alder, with many a wild flower and bell interspersed, and here and there a tuft of blooming heather. There in the fragrant shade the sisters would sit and work, and Aileen would sing her songs, rivalling in her thrilling strains the wood-notes wild which filled the air around them. And often, as with the feathered songsters, the burden of the song was love. Not that love had found out her heart so as to inspire her song; but that full warm nature of hers was prescient of a love which seemed only lacking to make her song seraphic.

So by the plantation she sat and sang. What wonder that this sewing siren should attract a wanderer's steps to her leafy settlement! What wonder that William Marshall, son of the neighbouring farmer, at home for his holiday from a writer's office at the county town, should risk the destruction of his trousers on the rough outer wall of "the planting," and all the thorns and brambles that intervened so that he might there join the sewing sisters? He was a lad of twenty, gawky, and given to blushes, as became his years, with a turn for song, too, and addicted to the flute—a pleasant lad

certainly, and, moreover, sensible and modest. William Marshall, then, on the long sunny evenings, did scramble over the fences and through the briars and the bushes, and sit with the sisters, and sing in the shade. Right and proper, O good boy, thus to follow things that are lovely and of good report!

Let there be no misapprehension. He never spoke of love, perhaps never thought of it. He came there to bear the pleasant girls a pleasant companionship, to exchange songs with Aileen, sometimes to mingle his voice with hers in the same song; to please both of them with his soft-breathing flute. That was all. What if he wandered sometimes through the wood or adown the bank, when tired of singing, to gather a posy for each of the young ladies—posy of wild flowers and fragrant briar? There was nought in that but the readiness of his excellent nature to show good-will and attention. There was always a posy for each of them. And although he did sometimes, in presenting them, sing staves of that old song, "A posy for my ain dear May," the sisters were equally conjoined in the compliment implied, and neither posy was "tied round with the silken band of love." Indeed, the ordinary ligature was a good black thread, or it might be white, drawn from the recipients' reels. This was very pleasant, no doubt, and the pleasure, you can understand, was mutual. But holidays will have their term and ending, and soon William Marshall said his farewell, and returned to his writing-desk.

They missed him very much when he was gone. Annabel, the strong-minded, said it was satisfactory to have a lad beside one sometimes who was not a brother. She thought herself livelier and stronger for it. Aileen said he was so amiable, and sang so well, and had so pleasant a manner, that she missed him greatly. Indeed, for many nights after he went away, she took no pleasure in her evening covert, no pleasure in her wonted songs. But the evenings grow quickly short in August, you know, and she was liable to moods, changing, I dare say, on slight cause. Perhaps the youth had shown more marked attention to her than to Annabel. She was not only the elder sister, but the singing sister, either of which things would account for this. Now that he is gone, pleasant recollections of him and of those evenings must remain with the girls. But the daily routine of household duties, and the steady practice of stitching, may be expected soon to fill up the void which his departure has caused. At least, that will be the natural course of things.

And, by-and-by, Aileen does sing again, but only the songs which this warbling clerk lad has taught her. She seems like never more to cease singing "Afton water," which was his master-performance, I suppose. Annabel, quiet as she is, begs a respite from it, promising distinctly to remember that "Mary is asleep," protesting no wish to disturb her. And Annabel is, at a long interval, annoyed to find the crown of her winter bonnet discoloured by contact with a mass of vegetable matter

and earthy stuff, which, on investigation, turns out to be a posy of wild forget-me-nots, gathered roots and all in the fields by that young man, and recklessly deposited by the elder sister in the bonnet which she mistook for her own. Thus, you may see that the lad's absence left somewhere quite a sensible void, needing not a little to overlay or fill it up.

In September following, "the ground officer" (bailiff) came to warn Mr. Stewart that the tenant of the shootings was to enclose the plantation anew, to the end that a few pheasants might be kept in it. The farmer regarded this as a piece of arbitrary dealing on the part of his landlord. He had always considered the wood's distant fence as the boundary of his farm. The plantation, however, was of little value to him. In fact, its only value was that in the winter snows the hoggets, which ate off his turnips and had the outrun of his holding, found shelter there from the north wind. In his family, nevertheless he spoke, with loud voice, of the enclosure as an odious grievance put upon him. Aileen had pleasant memories of the wood, which, whatever it might be to the hoggets, had been gracious to her when the bee sucked the honey-laden July flowers, and the choir of the woods rang loudest in melody. So she also thought it was a wrong to be deprived of it. Thereupon the hasty and sanguine father resolved he would see his lawyer about the matter, would ride thirty miles to town the very next day for the purpose of having advice about his rights. Be assured that when Counsellor Stewart rode so far on

this errand, his own mind was made up that he had "an excellent case." In his household, no voice was raised to stay him. Indeed, his children never dared to advise him in such matters. His opinion of his own sagacity would not have brooked that.

A man bent on litigation readily finds a lawyer to humour his inclination, and Counsellor Stewart was very soon involved in an action of interdict, in which he stood petitioner seeking to prevent all and sundry from enclosing that clump of wood. The question turned on this point: Was it or was it not part of the land of which he had the beneficial use as tenant? Unfortunately, his lease specified no boundaries. He got the farm as possessed by his predecessors, and they were scattered abroad. Thus, what was the limit of the farm became matter of probation, depending not only on his own actual possession, but on the testimony of the herds and servants of the farm for twenty, even thirty, years before, when the larches were first planted. Accordingly this insignificant subject became cause of serious contest and considerable expense. Meantime the sheriff refused the interdict, pending evidence of the farmer's right to possess the wood, and the sportsman put up a fence. But the Counsellor never flinched, never doubted of success, and over and over again promised the girls new frocks when he won the plea. Goodness knows, he was so little in the way of contributing to their dressing, that such a hazard was quite a fitting one on which to stake his doing so now.

William Marshall came into the district to get up the evidence on the part of his employer, the opposite law-agent. He had the aid, of course, of the estate officials. He came to call for Mr. Stewart and his daughters, and Stewart having introduced the subject, Marshall told him downright that he was wrong, that the evidence amounted to this, that until of late years, when the plantation had become an old one, and its fences had decayed, the tenants had been wholly excluded. But Counsellor Stewart would not listen; Marshall was but a young lawyer, and had heard but one side of the case. By-and-by the Counsellor would open his eyes.

So the weary proof was begun in the Sheriff-court of the county, and a host of witnesses were conveyed to the scene of the conflict, each enlisted on one side or the other, prepared to swear stoutly to facts seen through the coloured medium of his sympathies. The quality of the evidence was about equally low on both sides, and this rendered it necessary to attend to the quantity, as that which would probably turn the scale of justice. Of course, it needed no small sum to defray the cost of this host of witnesses. The crop had to be thrashed out early and sent to market, and a pair of the horses sold. And, what was worse than all the outlay and hazard, was the deteriorating effect on the Counsellor himself. Ever since the law plea was begun, he had been once, often twice, a week at Inverwick, and for continuous days he had scoured the country in

search of witnesses. Often he came home in liquor, sometimes cross, always loud-voiced and excited. Thus the miserable wood-clump brought great vexation to the hearts of the daughters, who could but little understand the various stages and phases of the litigation, although they listened patiently to their sire's detail of them; could not sympathise with their recital; could only pray that the lawsuit were well at an end.

At Candlemas there came another push for money, to make up the half-year's rent then payable. Aileen gave up her whole savings of the previous year, well-nigh £20, and the fear of an hypothecation of the farm stocking was removed. Unfortunately, in his elation, consequent on having the money in his hands, carried away too by the excitement of the struggle, Mr. Stewart again behaved unwisely; he would not pay the rent. He had claims of damages against his landlord for the loss of that worthless patch of wood, and, these claims unsatisfied, he would not part with his money. He consigned it in a bank. By this time his opponents had begun to warm to the work, which at first they had treated with the quiet indifference of their position; and forthwith, the rent being unpaid, proceedings were ordered for securing it by process of sequestration. The sheriff's officer appeared, and inventoried and set aside every movable thing upon the farm to abide the landlord's claim for rent, for realising which warrant was asked to sell the goods. The Counsellor resisted, and thus he now had two actions on hand. He fought

them bravely, persistently, from sheriff-substitute to sheriff-depute, and—for both were against him—to the Court of Session. There, as things were ordered at that time, two years elapsed before a decision, so that Mr. Stewart had ample time to reflect on the headlong course he had pursued. To do him justice, he never faltered in his faith in his cause. The sheriffs, he declared, were swayed by the rank and wealth of his opponents. "Mind, I dinna say that they ken it; but rank an' walth will aye hae waicht on the minds o' sma' folk, lik' sherras. Bide till we get afore the Lords! They'll mak' sma' banes o' a Yerl!"

And to abide the law's delay was all that remained for him, save at times a feeling of satisfaction that the great legal machine, its lords and who not, were to be moved and troubled on his behalf, must form opinions and utter speeches about this cause of his. While he waited, his daughters worked and sewed away, increasing in the esteem of the neighbourhood, and in repute in their calling. With good heart for work, with no small pleasure in it, they persisted, although a cloud of care and uncertainty and fear hung over them in that depending suit. Marshall they sometimes saw. He had caught the notice of the factor while engaged in the litigation, and had been retained as accountant in the estate office at Kirktown of Glenaldie. There he was now residing. Apparently he had ceased to play the flute. As for singing or laughter or compliment, these were now out of the question, for care had fixed upon the ladies, per-

haps had also settled on him, for in his new sphere of business he was a man doing a man's work among men. Indeed, when any reference was made to their cause of anxiety by the Misses Stewart, his views only tended to increase their apprehension of evil to come.

Still to Aileen it was a secret pleasure to meet him, for hers was the fervid, feeling nature that will cherish a sentiment, even when fate has hewn at every root of circumstances that fed it into semblance of vitality, has dried it up and left it a withered and dead thing. When now she sees him in mid-winter, he comes to her clothed and bright with the light of summer evenings, with breezes warm and song-burdened, and gay with flowers. So vivid is her imagination, her sentimentality, that what he once was that he shall ever be with her.

Needlework was not the most suitable occupation for a young woman constituted like her. It gave her time and opportunity for pressing hard into her sensitive soul the tiny things of life, which in the open air and with muscular effort would have been wiped off or strained away wholly. She would picture every expression, intensify every shade and colour of meaning, and every look of those around her. So she not seldom was unreasonably gay, more often vainly depressed, at all times the subject of exaggerated feeling and nervous fancy, never needing much of physical or mental cause to effect a change of her moods. One thing was certain and fixed—she was true to her ideas.

Such was the young woman who had initiated that industry of stitchings, who never ceased to stitch away while there was work to do; who had fired her larger and stronger sister with desire to share and advance the work; who taught that class of tall sewing girls, that assembled by eleven o'clock of the forenoon, in her father's ben-room, and stitched away all of them till night fell. Those who resided not far off, returned to sew through the long winter evening. The rates at which they sewed were certainly not prohibitory —a shilling for a full-breasted shirt, fifteen-pence for a cotton frock or gown, eighteenpence for a worsted one. For sixpence Aileen's deft fingers would trim up your straw bonnet with such riband and "gum-flowers" as you chose to bring her, doing it with wondrous taste and nicety. But you ought to know that the mystery of her millinery was not exposed to the vulgar "uptake" of the class. It was strictly secret, transacted in the privacy of her bed-chamber, a work of wonder and admiration to the country-side. It was strange how much money a year's sewings would sum up to, notwithstanding the humble tariff which ruled them.

At Christmas, when these artists were twenty and eighteen respectively, William Marshall came from his office at the Kirktown to spend the merry time with his parents. He came, of course, to see his friends at the little farm. And the sisters, withdrawing while he talked with their father, held serious consultation as

to the possibility of entertaining him to tea, on some night during his stay. Their great difficulty was this —they had no wheaten bread, no biscuit; and they knew what was proper and becoming and genteel, and sorrowfully Aileen said to Annabel, in her soft Doric voice, "It wad delicht us, nae doobt, dear, cud we hae mainaged it ony way, but we daurna think o' it wi'oot tea-breid an' jam. That we haena, an' we maunna disgrace oursel's afore him. It's great grief we didna forejudge his comin'."

Annabel replied, "It's a' nanesense, Aileen! He kens we haena the toun shops tae run till. He doesna expec' but countra fare i' countra places. He'll be content wi' what's gaein'."

But the elder sister was inexorable.

When they returned to their father and Marshall, "See here, cummers," said the former, "Wullie Marshall wants ye an' the louns ower tae his faither's the nicht, tae bring in the Christmas. I hae tae step doun tae the post lest there come ony letters, but I'll win tae ye betimes. Sae be buskit wi' haist. I'se warran' he'll hae Jock the piper waiting tae haet ye."

"Please come, Miss Stewart. It is bright moonlicht, eight o'clock will not be too early for you?" and he told her the names of two or three other young people who were to be there.

What made Aileen shrink from accepting hospitality such as a minute ago she was so eager to extend? Probably it was that sensibility of hers, which because

she found herself baulked in her own intended exhibition of kindness, would not have the pleasure in another form. She would excuse herself. She was not accustomed to pleasure. "It wad mak' a' her Christmas sad."

"We will gae wi' plaisure," said Annabel distinctly. "Aileen disna ken her ain mind. I'll undertake for her, William."

"I'll come for ye baith. Ye'll nae disappoint me, Aileen. Our little ploy would be pleasureless without you," said Marshall gallantly and coaxingly, even tenderly he said it.

Aileen flushed crimson. She did not answer, but at least Annabel knew that she consented.

Mr. Marshall's father's home and homestead were very similar to those of Counsellor Stewart. In early days the young people were intimately acquainted with each other's firesides, although there was no doubt of the fact that the boy William was at least three times at the Aird farm for once the young Stewarts were induced to visit him. "Now they're man and woman grown;" and as they grew the real distinctions of life had grown up to make for each of them his and her own separate existence, in which the sweet spontaneity and interfusion of young life cease to be. William Marshall was a man and an accountant. The girls were the women you know of. But together, and with the two lads, Mr. Stewart's sons, and half-a-dozen other young people, they supped on Christmas-eve under the

presidency of the parents Marshall; and while they pledge the merry glass of whisky punch, hot and weak, and pass quiet jokes amid ready laughter, Aileen becomes the gay Aileen that she is sometimes, for she is by William Marshall's side, and he is solicitous to please her. "Come, let us sing, Aileen," he says aloud; "let us do 'The Flowers of the Forest' aince mair." And they sing it together, each feeling fully the pathos which the other evolves. Life after all is pleasant, when seams and the sewing of them, and all the dark clouds of life are rolled back from the halcyon present, even though the pathetic song tells that when you taste life's pleasure, you shall certainly find its decay. What matter? Come to the barn, where the shrill pipe is screaming its rhythmic groans and shrieks, that shall urge you to the wild reel.

The barn was decorated with branches of larch, boughs of evergreen, and holly with its berries red; and William Marshall proclaimed that here and there among the foliage hung sprigs of the sacred mistletoe. Each youth was free to kiss the lady whom he found underneath it. "Mother," said he, "just look at it." And the old lady being thus beguiled beside him and beneath the mystic leaves, he set them all a-laughing by saluting her then and there. "The rule is absolute," said her son. But on with the dance, why does it linger? for Aileen is to dance with this gallant so gay and winning. And in the rapid and hilarious reel, she loses herself in the movement and in his entwining

arms, so that at its close, she is thoughtlessly with him under the mistletoe, and he imprints on her pretty, pouting lips a kiss which thrills and burns to her heart and brain, half in astonished confusion, half in delight self-acknowledged. Then he led her to his mother and whispered to her as she sat down, "I have Annabel yet to catch. You know I love you both."

And Annabel was nothing loath to be caught, nothing loath to be kissed of him, I think, although she had resisted and repulsed James Graham, who first had danced with her. "Kissing goes by favour," you know, and very properly it should. But while, thereafter, the young man stood between the sisters, asking which would volunteer a second bus to him, the barn door opened, and in staggered their father, haggard of visage and wild with excitement. "Bairns! neebors!" he cried, "I'm a ruined an' a bankrup' man! I hae lost ma pleas at Embro'! Curse on them wha drave me tilt!" Instantly his daughters and his sons ran to him, but Aileen did not reach his side. She fell senseless on the floor.

Marshall raised her tenderly. "Counsellor, you should bear this reverse quietly, and like an old limb of the law," he said. "You should not so rashly have cast it into our little merry-making. You have hurt poor Aileen, I am afraid."

Then the rough man cursed himself and his reckless folly. He would have taken his daughter in his rough arms and lamented over her, but Marshall held her and

kept him aside while they brought water with which he bathed her face. Slowly she revived, and turned her soft blue eyes upon him whose arms sustained her with a smile ineffably sweet, so full of languid tenderness, that the young man, seeing it, feared she was really ill. He asked her if she felt pain. None. "Then fetch her shawl and traps, and we'll go to the house." So the silvery stream of life "grew drumlie and dark," even while it rolled under this tiny sunbeam of pleasure. And it rolled on into more broken, vexed shallows, for the father was driven into bankruptcy, and out of his farm, and came among us.

CHAPTER II.

THUS it was that Robert Stewart came to our village, bankrupt in fortune, somewhat dilapidated in his personal appearance, but much regarded of the poorer sort, who counted not his reckless litigation for a sin, and greatly esteemed the courage that had led him into the fray and its disaster. Not even the disaster diminished the reputation of Counsellor Stewart. One and all the common people believed that "the strongest purse aye carries the day" even in the highest tribunals; this false belief being simply the outgrowth of the too apparent disparity of the opponents—parasite of the generous tendency to side with the weaker. Still was the disaster really a grave one. It broke up the

little household, left them penniless, without a blanket, without a stool. Forthwith, before the day when the whole plenishing and effects of the little farm were sold off, the two sons took "assisted passages," and went out emigrants to Australia, preferring very properly a hopeful expatriation to the cheerless prospect of farm labour, which alone lay before them at home. The Counsellor, still upholding his large appearance before the world, still speaking out his loud tones, was fain to become tenant of the centre flat of a house in the village Square, consisting of two rooms and two bed closets, the whole accommodation of his future home, save and excepting the right to build his peat stack in the back yard. The remaining parts of the house were occupied by no less than four families.

William Marshall did not turn his back upon his old friends in in this sad reverse. As accountant in the estate office, he had been selected for the office of trustee in the bankruptcy, so that, officially, he was bound repeatedly to visit the farm before they removed from it; but he ever came as a gentle friend, not as the stern representative of the creditors. He it was who gave the lads five pounds a piece to provide an outfit, taking their obligations to repay it by-and-by. He it was who engaged for the father and daughters their new home, which, humble as it was, was fully equal to their immediate prospects of an income. He also it was who, having received the consent of the other officials in the bankruptcy, let Aileen have with her such necessary articles of furni-

ture as she chose to select at the official valuation, taking her obligation for payment at a year's date. He was kind and considerate as a brother might be, and he did all he did so gently, saying nought of it, that I am sure even Annabel, the hard to move, was touched. Aileen, with her ready and mobile heart, gushed out towards him with a sense of obligation and a feeling of love, such as scarcely recognised any boundary but that genuine, feminine modesty which bent both heart and eyes in his presence.

It was a great and unpleasant change this that had come to them, to be transplanted from the free country breezes, country milk and produce, country scenes and associations, to that over-peopled house in the village Square. Most of all they felt the change through the class of people who lived above and below them, seeing their own poverty more distinctly in the hard, narrow lives thus forced upon their knowledge. For the first few days Aileen did little but cry, lying on the bed in the west closet, feeling much misery, in an indefinite way, much ailing of both body and mind. How were they to be fed, that was one pressing care, when the boll of meal and sack of potatoes, which Annabel and she had found in the kitchen-room, were exhausted? She did not know. She scarcely cared. This only she knew, that she could gladly die of want of food, rather than be fed by the hand of William Marshall. That was what she thought of principally in this question of food, and I dare say it came of her excessive, delicate

sense of obligation, which, it is as well to own it, I fear was wholly love.

In these first days of their new home, William Marshall was in the country. So also was their father. Both, indeed, were at the roup of the farm things, and busy with many things which at term time press upon men connected with land. Annabel said she longed for Marshall's coming. They would all get back some of the old home feeling when once they had the sight of a face they knew. Aileen said she did not wish him to come. Why should he come? He was a great man in the village, and they were the daughters of a poor bankrupt. It would be right that he should stay away. She could not fashion her thought, so pure she was, to any notion that impropriety might lurk in his coming. She felt only that they were poor and he prospering, that as she could not bridge the gap between them, she would not have him come to them. Then she cried. But she cried so much in all those sad days, that Annabel was often fain to wish that she were not "sae saft," setting the crying down mostly to a constitutional proneness to tears.

But the fifth day of their stay was Friday, an ordinary market-day, when many country folks with little errands came to the village, and not a few came to see the "Miss Stewarts," as they were called. Not a few, also, there were who brought them frocks and clothing of all sorts to be made up, so much that that one day heaped on them as much as a month could

sew. Until that day neither sister had crossed the house door. Now Aileen had to go out to "the shop" to select materials for customers, to detail the quantities of linings, and tapes, and small wares needed for the equipment of the dresses; and the merchant was so excessively pleasant and courteous to her, so eager to meet all her wishes, that she recovered much of her ordinary spirits, at least got rid for the time of that terrible despondency that had beset her, and took heart for work in her new field and sphere. You know all the time it was simply the trade habit of the shopkeeper. He was a wise man, who had so tutored and trained himself in a long life, that his habitual civility to all who gave him their money could scarcely make distinctions between the poor and the rich. He bowed and scraped, and said, "Yes, ma'am," to all. Poor Aileen thought he was personal, and it did her great good.

So when at night William Marshall did come in, knowing nothing of those days of weeping and sighs by-past, he found no small brightness, some energy, considerable effort in cutting and shaping of cloth for the sewing about to begin. He urged the sisters to walk out every day, so that there might be less fear of evil results from their change of living, told them of the pleasant walks around, the crag at the bridge, the hazel wood of the Bught, and all the places about where Nature had cast her wild beauty abroad; and he promised to take them some afternoon to the top of

romantic Benaldie. He did not stay long, but his visit, as Annabal predicted, revived them not a little. Next time he came he would have tea with them. Meantime he would tell in the shops and public places that they were open to receive scholars.

On Saturday their father found his way to the new home. His heavy weight, as he went up the stairs, made the wooden staircase creak again, groaning underneath him. He found everything about the place distasteful, as no doubt the limited accommodation really was to his great mind. He was wretched and unhappy because compelled to stay indoors all the long Sunday morning. He would not go to church. Discontented and sulky, he alternated from the fireside to the closet bed, where he lay awake but without words, then back in restlessness to the fireside again. It was good that to-morrow he could go forth; to be thus cabined, cribbed, confined, would kill him.

By-and-by, their lives fell into more easy ways and ran more smoothly. There was much to sew, and a few young people of the village as scholars. Aileen's tastefulness in millinery soon won recognition, and the merchant sent quite a number of bonnets to be trimmed, and had every week some shillings to pay her. Life thus had pleasure and hope once again. The father too began to meditate some course of dealing to bring some reward of money, and, after his nature, became hopeful in each projected vision, doomed only to be discarded and superseded by other

visions as hopeful. He was not much at home during the day. His daughters, being up betimes, in turns, scoured down the wooden landing-place and staircase, fetched in the day's supply of water and of peats, and did the other necessary house-work—doing it so early of the morning that not a neighbour knew how it was done nor by whom. His breakfast was early ready, to be eaten as soon as he left his bed, the porridge and milk, the butter, and oatcakes, and eggs, and hot tea, all as abundant as when the farm with bountiful store supplied all such things. They were paid for, of course, out of the daughters' earnings. They ate their oat cakes dry, drank much weak tea in their busy days and nights; molasses, not milk, was the savouring of their porridge. The father went forth immediately after breakfast, and contrived somehow to pass his days away from the little home, but he ever returned sharp at nine o'clock, to rest and talk awhile at the kitchen fire before he went to bed. At last he found his way to a remunerative profession. He had ever been much resorted to as an unpaid referee and valuator in country matters, transfers of stock, claims of melioration, and the like. He took out an auctioneer's and appraiser's licence, and made a moderate charge for his services. One of his old friends readily helped him by a bill to the ten pounds, the heavy duty on his new calling. Still his ways were as I have told; and it appeared as if he saw little need to help with coin the girls who stitched

so hard, for of whatever he might be earning he gave them nothing. Many months had passed, however, before he thus began to earn money, and another Whitsunday was drawing near, with its changes and its public sales. Perhaps his total earnings were but little in excess of the heavy licence duty.

And in those long months of that first year of village life, what of that love or loving disposition of Marshall towards Aileen, or of Aileen towards Marshall? Did it make no progress? None that I could see—that the world could see. He called on the girls every Saturday evening with strictest regularity, and got a cup of tea. If they were busy he got his tea in the family room, apart from the scholars in the ben-room, and he sat with them, until some call for Aileen to supervise the work of the pupils made it apparent that he was in the way of progress. Over and over again on autumn afternoons he had a Saturday ramble with them. But in her secret heart Aileen recognised the fact that this man, so constant, so kindly, so admirable in all a man's best qualities, gave her no more than that considerate love that a brother might give her; that and no more.

Did Aileen accept the state of things we have described, and wean her heart from its incipient affection? Ah, reader! hearts are supremely difficult of treatment. Obstinate and wayward when we seek to win them; most obstinate and wayward to be weaned. And the heart of this girl Aileen, so worthy to be wooed and

won, with its eagerness, its purity, its gratitude, its idiosyncrasies, like tides of impulsive feeling, was it to be constrained by any course of treatment? Was hers the voice to say, with hope of quietude, "Peace, be still?" She did feel that a terrible conflagration might break out, from the little spark of her affection, to consume her heart and life, and she heaped on it all the weight of reason and of circumstances, hoping to extinguish it. She tried ofttimes, too, with her tears to cool and quench it—a bad, bad remedy, I tell you. Love is like heat in this at least—we do not understand it much, we cannot grasp it, and too often it bursts forth so that it cannot be controlled. But, indeed, she believed that she had smothered it, that all that remained was the reasonable interest in this faithful friend which neither you nor I, much less she, could desire to be upgiven or put away. "Nae, whilst I leeve I'll aye bear him depth o' gratitude, store o' hairtfeelin', walth o' a' guidwill—but it's no luve that I bear noo." It is well that she can say and think it. She is a woman of keen, clear intellect; but do you believe her? "Keep thy heart with all diligence," O reader; "for out of it are the issues of life."

We are in the April in which the father took that high-priced licence, nearly twelve months after they had settled in the village. The sewing is not oppressive, because, you know, the purchasing of clothing is mostly deferred till the great money term, the approaching Whitsuntide. But there is some sewing,

and the girls know that they will be strained and pushed hardly enough when the term arrives. Brilliant sunshine waits not for the term, and there are glorious, balmy spring evenings, with soft, western breezes. Yet has not Mr. Marshall proposed to the sisters a single walk this season. Since spring came round in assured geniality, he says he has been overworked, kept hard at figures and accounts, and it seems to be the fact. Well, quiescent hearts long not for rambles; perhaps think it well that they should not gad about; find comfort in the fact they see—he goes to work at his office hours punctually. He is never to be seen idle in the Square or highway. Be still, O heart, that longs for the green trees budding, for the lark's wild song. Is not he shut up from them also? And what were the distant greenwood, the loving lark songs, unless he were there? Aileen bears the confinement of the winter thus prolonged into the sunny days calmly at least. Annabel, the quiet, had enough to do with her work.

The evening sun goes down in the west, of course, here as elsewhere; but here it throws the shadow of Benaldie, in long projection, over the north side of the village Square, whose eastern angle is lighted up with the setting splendours of the orb of day. The bright [illegible] looks even weirdly dazzling from the contiguity of [illegible]. Aileen pauses in her stitching at the window [illegible] into the sheen, at once so brilliant and so [illegible] That dingy warehouse, "the merchant's shop,"

glows in the golden sunset, an emporium of celestial beauty, where angels, not grimy men and women, might resort. Wearily she is staring at it, with idle needle the while, when suddenly, out of the dark shade into the bright light, come two figures; surely angelic they are, so graceful and bright, each the fitting companion and complement of the other. So graceful and bright they seem, that they draw from Aileen an unconscious exclamation, "Oh!" Long-drawn and peculiar it is, and it brings Annabel to her side. "Marshall and Barbara Ross," said Annabel quietly. "I thoucht it was something extraordinair!"

Now Barbara Ross was "the merchant's" daughter, and he was a rich man and a worldly. He stood "high" in the community, and his daughter was "a young lady" of no small expectations. She had been educated in the south, at Edinburgh and London, it was said. She was no acquaintance of our poor dress-makers, for all her things were made either in the county town or further away. She dressed handsomely too, and was a girl fair to look upon. Aileen could hear her silvery laugh come softly through the shadows that lay between them, could hear faintly the clear tones of his voice. They were parting, parting gaily, happily, as if there was happiness in certainty of meeting again. He bowed, uncovering his head, an act of courtesy rarely to be seen in these parts, save when the ungraceful rustic, with rude action, doffs his cap to his superior, the factor or other potent man of

the Strath. In Aileen's eyes this ordinary courtesy of Marshall appears as the perfection of grace, as she sees it executed in that celestial sunlight from her little workroom, shabby and dingy, buried in the shade. You know that in the long months by-past she thought that she had made herself mistress of her heart and her emotions, yet now is her chest oppressed, heaved with a breathing, protracted and broken, and at her heart is a sickening pain. Ah me! can this be a dead love, the thorns of which are so sharp to prick? Well, perhaps the thorns of your dead rose are more prompt to wound because there are no green leaves, no living flower to intercept them, even in part. She could not eat her bit of dry cake that night, when, her seam being laid down, she took some tea.

"Ailee, I'll boil an egg for ye," said Annabel, "yo scarce ait oucht at a'."

"I canna ait! Deed I dinna ken what is comin' ower me! Am no feelin' lik' masel!"

Can any one feel like herself, I wonder, whose heart is cut out and carried away, leaving only pain and hollowness where the fount of life should be?

They had no dainties wherewith to coax appetite. You know how much nice morsels will do to stimulate semblance of heart action. How could they have things which implied cost, when they had so much to do to wipe off the debt contracted at their settlement there? They had paid their half-year's rent at Martinmas. Last Saturday they had paid to Mr. Marshall

the last pound of ten, the value of the furniture he had given to them. They had the Whitsunday term at hand, and rent to pay then. Other debts they had none; but to have lived and done so much, their living must have been of the barest. It is wonderful on how little life can be supported, with how little some quiet show and appearance of the better things of life may be made to the world without.

But what was all the outward show, what the real success which had kept them and fed them and paid off their debts, when there was no heart for the work, only nimble fingers, and a heated, weary brain to guide them? What is even the pleasure of that Saturday visit, when the visitor comes calmly and as of duty, with no greater emotion than he bears about in the every-day life of him, certainly with little of that grace and brightness which he puts on with Miss Ross? Indeed, life's yearnings are painful, its sickness great, its faintness frequent, when thus it sits in the cold shade, stitching much and eating barely, mainly feeling its own lovelessness, while sunshine and beauty and grace are abroad in the world. Aileen must pull wearily on at her stitching, must prick her soul often in the silent stitching, I fear.

Yet it is good that he will come on Saturday evenings, evenings longed for, notwithstanding the unsubstantial pleasure they offer. You see that as she tells herself she is not in love, that she has put away all love from her, she feels free to long for those visits,

finding some solace in them through his presence; now and again, some pain. She thinks the pain proof that she has conquered her love. Indeed, she will not own to herself that she ever loved this man. She only would have loved; but had she not resolved that she must not?

He comes again, pleasant as ever, gayer than for many weeks. He has heard of an engagement in a far-off land, the managership of a great estate and many men in one of the colonies, which will suit him, to which he hopes he shall be appointed. It will make life clear before him, make him a man of position and of promising fortune. Annabel is loud in her pleasure in his prospects, and shares his gaiety and his hopes. Aileen can scarcely wish him success.

"Come, I can sing to-night, Aileen. Let us do 'The Flowers of the Forest' together once again."

"I canna sing, Marshall," she said.

"I canna tell you, William, how dispirited and feeble she has been for weeks past, I don't know what to make o' her," said Annabel. "You maun take us tae walk."

"I *maun* tak ye, Annabel; quite right, for I am bound to take you. I met Miss Ross the other night, and she asked me to a picnic on Benaldie. I said no, that I was under promise to go there with you two, and that with you I must go first. So, when shall it be?"

And this was what he had been saying in the bright light, this was what had pained and troubled her so

sorely! How could she guess that in the bright sunshine he had withstood the appeal of the rich girl, and said her "nay," remembering them? Aileen will warm and thrill with emotion at this proof of his goodness. Now she can sing; for the warmth and light of his loving-kindness fall gently on and around her. But while she sang the mournful song in concert with him, to the excitement of the occupiers of the premises above and below them, the utter hollowness of her happiness struck her, struck her as with blow of strength and rudeness, and she burst into tears.

He tried to comfort her with loving words, wounding and distressing her the more, causing her tears to flow the faster. He thought she was really ill, and almost lost his presence of mind in his sympathy. Annabel urged him to let her alone. "She maun hae her cry, Marshall. She'll come round in a wee bit, if she's let cry hersel' oot."

How could it be that they did not guess her malady?

On May-day he went with them to the summit of Benaldie, and the rugged crag shed no shadow upon Aileen, although the sunshine was very brilliant. He waited upon her steps with tender assiduity, helped her up each steep part of the way, sat beside her resting in the sheltered nooks, gathered for them posies of yellow primroses and harebells, violets and hyacinths wild, and fringed them round with the deer-grass green. The posies were as rudely picturesque in

colour as was the form of the rock from which they were gathered. This was to live again, this was to live and know a joy in life; and for the time Aileen was radiant as the day itself, as gay as the wild birds that screamed or whistled in the crags, feeling as little as they the hollowness of life, the evanescence of sunshine.

Dreamily she sank down exhausted on the summit, on the mossy bank lipped round with outcropping rock, gazing down and afar into the projected strath below, where the lively green of the corn was interspersed with wood clumps, and the meandering rivers flowed by rocky defile and by widespread pool through the rich land, and all things rejoiced in the glory of sunshine. Dreamily and exhausted she sat and saw it; dreamily and exhausted, too, she was happy in her soul's prospect, not defining it, for it was lost in the radiance around her, and the eye could not see for the light that oppressed it. She felt the landscape's richness and beauty, although no definite picture was given to her soul, felt it and was soothed and quieted and gladdened in the feeling of it. Woe is me, for it is but a Pisgah view of a land that her life shall not enter. She knows it not, and is happy in the present faith and hope, which are almost sight.

He had his pockets laden with comfits and choice little biscuits, had this good fellow, and he had also a great flask of milk. In his country travels, which were frequent, he always carried this flask of milk, for

he drank nothing stronger. He regaled and refreshed his two prétty friends with these. When he shall come back from that gold-bearing region of his hopes in the far southern sea, Miss Aileen will be a plump little lady, and she must come to this crag-top with him. "If she is not fit to come up without your help now, how will she manage the hill when she's fat?" said Annabel. "Well, we'll carry her up!" he said, although how she was to be carried was not at all clear, by a balloon or some such thing, I suppose; and he would spread a sumptuous table for them among the rude pines, and lacqueys should wait on them, eager to supply every wish. That would beat Miss Ross's picnic, he was sure. "We must get up some such great affair for Aileen, I think, before I go, Annabel," he cried in his glee and folly: what could he mean? She was so happy to-day that she asked not what he meant; did not even apply herself to thought of the sorrow which thought of his going from her should import.

Her May-day illusions remain with her. She is bright and gay when term day comes, with its scores of print frocks, and merino gowns, and gay jackets, and what not, all to be shaped and sewn by her and her few scholars, for most of the pupils of the winter have left for their summer avocations. Mr. Marshall's fate or fortune is still undetermined: but, while anxious, to her he is ever the same, solicitously thoughtful and tender. He has been once or twice

lately to Inverwick; and, lo! the secret of her abiding brightness. He has brought back his photograph in a gold brooch, one for each; and Aileen wears it on her breast every day—all day, so that in some sort he is ever with her. Annabel lays hers by with her Sunday gloves.

I remember the sisters well in those days, knowing them mostly by their appearance in church-going. Their father went regularly with them, his portly figure attired in a black surtout with ample skirts. On his right tripped Aileen, slight, fragile-looking, and graceful; on his left stalked the stately and handsome Annabel. The daughters were habited alike, in merino frocks of a russet green, that pretty-green which emulates nature in her shading when she tinges her green with brown and yellow in incipient autumn. Over these frocks they wore paletots of black cloth, models of manufacture, which displayed, perhaps enhanced, the handsomeness of the younger, the *petite* figure and grace of the elder sister. They were, what they looked, nice girls, tasteful and sincere, pure-minded, lovable.

CHAPTER III.

THE human mind is a strange study, in its ever-varying moods and phases. Ofttimes it is full of foreboding fears, great pain, and sorrow when there is nought, in fact, to excite it to such feeling. Ofttimes

when real causes for anxiety present themselves the mind will not feel them, sucking comfort and sweetness from even the bitter things around it, assimilating them to its own passing moods. So now with Aileen. When reference was made to Marshall's probable departure, Annabel looked grave, and spoke of it in serious wise. Aileen seemed to hug the notion of his going, a pleasant thing coming to her. How was this, I wonder? She was happy, you know, soul-satisfied; she knew not wherefore, asked herself not why. Could it be that she anticipated a joyous day, a day of crowning joy in the fête he had talked of getting up for her before he should go away? Or did she, knowing the man's integrity and steadfastness, know also and trust to his love unspoken, unspoken only because with his slender income and the demands on it, he would not whisper his love till his fortune and power to consult his own happiness were secure? It were hard to say. Suffice it; she was happy, even excited in the glow and warmth of her happiness, feeling not the hours long through which she stitched from early morn till midnight; feeling no need of food nor burden of changeless labour in the peace and pleasure of her soul.

I missed them from church one Sunday, the third Sunday of June it was, and I saw the doctor go to the house, and then I sent to inquire for them. Aileen had awakened that Sunday morning with throbbing, painful head, lethargic, and feeble, scarcely able to say that

she was ill, certainly unable to rise. She had sat till eleven o'clock the night before, hard stitching to finish a large parcel of mourning garments for the family of the ground officer deceased. She was worn out. Annabel hoped that this was but a passing ailment, but the doctor looked grave. There must be no more of this late sewing, he said. She must eat more, and go out of doors very much more, if she wished to live and to be well.

All that Sunday, all through that Sunday night, and on until the Monday, Annabel tenderly watched and cared for her, and she lay, making little plaint, but very restless, feeling back or side sore and bruised when she had lain still but for a little. What was her soul full of? Was it of peace, or of unrest such as tossed her poor, thin frame? I cannot tell.

But on Monday evening there came to her bedside, I was about to say, a messenger of peace and life, but I dare scarcely say it. True, he came saying with honest intent, "Be still and live," and he knew not, dreamed not, that he was bringing and ensuring to her unrest and death. But Marshall came with gentle step and voice, asking what ailed her, urging her to get better, —she must get better for his sake. And he kissed her flushed cheek and burning brow, gently, tenderly, and whispered kind, even loving words, and breathed into her soul somewhat of his own strength and life. Long he sat in the little closet, while Annabel sat sewing her seams on the bedside, and the sick maiden was calmed

and revived ere in the summer twilight he went his way. O, ailing one! is he not your true physician? Does not your soul burn within you while he sits and talks, consuming away all fear and doubt and painful misgivings in his presence, in which are peace, and assurance, and gladness, and strength? She feels that she could get up and fly away, her spirits are so enlivened. Alas! when she raises her head, her bodily weakness is so great that she sinks back exhausted.

Reassured and reinvigorated of mind, Aileen would scarcely admit her bodily weakness. At any rate, the weakness yielded to the simple cordials they gave her. July found her seated at the open window, enjoying the sunshine, often also found her in the evening in grassy lane and by sheltering hedge-row, leaning on Marshall's arm, and followed by Annabel the composed. They did not stitch much in those days, because the busy season was past, and further because Annabel thought fit, as the manager of affairs in the meantime, to refuse certain pieces of work which were offered to her. Still would the moods of Aileen vary, from listless despondency to morbid gaiety, while no one could tell the causes which induced the one or promoted the other. A look, a word, a gesture of that accountant, nay, even the failure to see the look, to hear the word which she would hear or see, sufficed to account for it all.

In that same July came a bright surprise. Aileen was sitting at the open window and full of moodi-

ness. "If the sewin' fail us, what shall we dae? There is nae wark! We haena won twa crouns i' the month gane, and the lang winter comin' on! I'm but a sair burden on ye, Annabel!" Annabel said it was nonsense. They had made five pounds since the term, and it was right to rest awhile. Indeed, she longed to bid good-bye to sewing altogether. To Aileen, in her present mood, this sounded like flat rebellion. In her livelier hours, no doubt, she could have participated in the longing, and felt no sin. At present, she referred her sister's desire to herself and her own weakness. Because she could not work as she used to do; because "the management," as well as what seams were to be sewed, had all devolved on Annabel, therefore was Annabel disheartened and longing for relief. So thinking, the tears came into Aileen's eyes, and she gulped down her ever-ready emotion to find it sticking hard in her throat. When, most unusual at that hour of the evening, they heard their father's footsteps hastily on the staircase, and he almost rushed, not as he was wont to do into the kitchen, but into their little room, Aileen instantly concluded that some disaster had befallen him, and got up in trepidation, excitedly asking what evil it was. "Nae ill, my dochters!" he said aloud; "far frae ill is ma errand! Gudeness kens hoo aft ma hairt wus sair, seein' ye twa shewin' awa for bare life, an' me winnin' naething, or neist tae naething, weel nigh a warthless sorner on yer cident wark. It's ended noo; clean dune an' by-gane! I can keep yo noo as I ne'er

did afore. Am the new grun' officer! thank God and Willie Marshall!"

Aileen sank down on her chair, and clasped her hands. Was this man's goodness ever to encompass her life? She thought surely it must be for ever. Annabel very composedly said she was glad to hear it, that indeed she had been longing for it, because for a month she knew Marshall was using all his influence to bring it about, resolved to speak of it only in the event of success. Now she trusted that he himself should get the appointment he desired, and which was depending for so long. Thereupon, in the midst of what was matter of rejoicing, Aileen broke out into tears, knowing not, I dare say, what caused her to weep, feeling soreness somehow because their true friend had confided to the strong-minded Annabel what he had withheld from her weakness.

"Gudesakes, lassie! are ye greetin' for joy?" cried the father.

Annabel was so used to her sister's melting moods that she spoke of it not at all.

"Dinna tak' on, Aileen," said the father soothingly; "ye helpit an' uphauddit me in ma straits. I'll keep ye sweet an' aisy, dear lass, while am spaired hencefoorth."

This touch of happy fortune, had softened the rugged nature of the man. But, indeed, he loved his daughters and was proud of them; and they, you must own, were worthy of all the love he had or could bestow.

Marshall, the beneficent, came as usual, of course; came without word or sign of the goodness he had done. And, oh, it were difficult to pourtray the feelings of intensified love—love that was almost reverence—with which one of the sisters awaited his coming, feelings that would have had their highest gratification if she could have done aught to show somewhat of them, could show some little abasement of herself before him in testimony of her love and reverence, even like the woman of old, who wiped the feet of Him adored of her with the hair of her head. But this man gave her no chance of such exhibition, for the tender solicitude and regard were all showed forth by him when he came, and no room was left for even the casual expression of the emotion which choked her, which only found indication in her face.

He had arranged that the widow of the late bailiff would vacate the official cottage at the Lammas term, 1st August, when they should be free to possess it. They knew the pretty cottage well, with its rustic porch and woodbine and honeysuckle, and the arched gateway of the entrance-garden, wreathed with tangled hops, and the acre or more of garden and grass land whereon fed the sleek-skinned, roan-coloured cow. Why, there was health and strength, as well as love and gratitude, in the bare thought of it to the poetic fancy of this girl Aileen. She could have poured out her thanks, she would most certainly have betrayed the feelings stronger than gratitude which filled her; but when she would

have begun, Annabel said, "Noo, nae nanesense, Aileen, nane o' yer thankgivin'; William kens oor hearts ower weel tae require the like o' that."

And William said it was true. But more, for the first time, he spoke of love; they knew he loved them both, and he knew they loved him; and what was a kindness between them? "I'll tell you what, Aileen, dear, if I get this managership, I have a secret to tell you before I go away, and you must gather health and strength before I tell it." The blood flowed back from Aileen's fair face, leaving it deadly pale, and it swelled around her heart in surging tide, which choked her voice while her heart and breast were full to bursting. Was this the secret of his love?

The cottage stood about a quarter of a mile from the village Square, five minutes' walk or so; and Mr. Robert Stewart and his daughters with their household goods were transferred to it in the early days of August. Before they took possession, Annabel had several days' hard work alone in the cottage, sweeping and whitewashing, and scouring it, all alone in the work of it, for as yet Aileen had not strength to help her; indeed, was too weak to go out. There was no doubt about it, the cleaning up of the cottage, which it were wrong and ill-will unmistakable for their predecessors to leave clean and swept and garnished at their outgoing, was all done by the hands of the stately Annabel. Day by day she went across the Square, handsome and neatly dressed as she always was to be

seen, and she tripped along the lane up to the cottage, as proud of mien as handsome girl might look, stepped like a queen through the cottage-gate and garden, perhaps stayed a little while to dally with the flowers before she let herself into the cottage. She had carried thither her scrubbing-brushes, and her whitewash, and her water-supply the night before; and now her outer garments so pretty were laid aside, and she went to the rough work with that thoroughness and steady zeal which intelligence and will to work give to sound and ready muscles. The little parlour and their own bedroom she papered with a paper choice although cheap, as neatly as the most skilful workman could do it. That was the character of these girls, you know. A fulness of womanly dignity, a high natural refinement that made them the equals of the best people of any class, and which took no stain from the necessities of their position, demanding toil for food, or effort and toil like this for the amelioration of their home life. Then when her day's work was ended, and she had washed up and dressed again, again she stepped out into the evening light, the queen she was, dallied with the flowers again, selected the choicest to carry to Aileen, and went her stately way.

At length they were all transferred to the cottage, and were happy in its pleasantness and comfort. The new ground officer was earnest in his resolution that he should now supply all their wants. He addressed a letter to the factor, empowering his daughters, or either

of them, to grant receipts for his salary, which was £5 per month. His daughters must manage everything, spend all that money or save it if they could. He would handle none of it. Was there not great cause for thankfulness in this turn of fortune, wholly propitious, laden with happiness and goodness?

In the garden, under the beech-tree, fenced about with a thicket of roses, Mr. William Marshall had a rustic seat set up, where, in the warmth of the August evening, Aileen could sit and yet not be oppressed with the glare of sunshine; and there she was contented to sit under the shadowy boughs amid the perfume of roses. There, too, he often sought her; for the cottage lay on his way to his own home. There he came with his flute to rival the thrush and the blackbird as of old, with song and roundelay; and peace and great blessedness came to these sisters with his coming, albeit, they were so different of nature. Annabel, calm, almost bearing a look of indifference even when most pleased, that is, when he strove most to please her; Aileen, ready to swell at chest and throat, and to break out in tears that flowed from the happiness infelt by her, if he passed the bounds of his constant, steady kindliness, spoke one tender word. I am sure she behaves quite sillily in the matter of that brooch and photograph. She will wear it, with reason or without, always bearing it on her bosom, who knows how often wetting it with her tears, while her hand holds it and none is by. I am sure Annabel would do no such silly

thing. Yet Annabel, I do not doubt it, rejoiced in her still and quiet way on his coming. Aileen's quiet and peace were bounded wholly by his presence, perhaps, in some measure, because then she would bind and coerce herself. When he went away, then ofttimes, as when wintry suns have set and gone from the world, cold winds and dreary, dismal darkness set upon her soul forlorn, oppressed by doubts and sore with painful longings.

He says she must get strong for his sake, that he may walk out with her, that she may be able to bear his little secret before he goes away. He says it with soft glen that is almost tender. Again, she asks herself what can it be but his love conceaied by the silence which just now it were unwise to break? She thinks much of it, hopes much of it, is comforted much by it. But she dare not say she is strong enough, she is not strong enough to hear him tell that he loves her. Be still, O throbbing heart, that so flutters and beats in the faith of his secreted love! It would burst and bleed in the full assurance of it.

But herein was not only a motive to gather strength, but a cordial to give it. So she slowly began to creep about the fuchsias and the roses, to select a posy for him of the daintiest fragrance and choicest colouring within the garden's compass. Strength to walk about came to her gradually, helped in its coming, probably, by the abundant milk from their own cow, with which Annabel assiduously fed her. But then, again, ever when she

felt strongest came those throbbings of heart and alternate flushing and paling of cheek, which made her limbs bend and tremble, made her fain to lie down to seek to still her soul. In fact, the constant ebb and flow of emotion in her was the real obstacle to convalescence. Yet still the recuperative force of life is strong at twenty-two, will fight a hard fight before it renders up itself; and here, too, life was ofttimes strengthened by hours of hope, even of hope assured and blessed, so that it seemed ultimately life would triumph. Annabel never doubted it. But Annabel knew nothing of the conditions of the struggle for life which her sister was enduring—believed, as did all around this ailing one, that her illness was the result of over-work and harassment.

Shall she ever gather strength, I wonder, to bear the secret for which she longs, yet which she dreads to hear in her perverse sensitiveness? Surely she shall; for as the days wane in August, she is able to greet him with a smile and a posy at the garden gate. Yes, more, she is able, with Annabel, to loiter out in the lane, to wander somewhat wearily to the neighbourhood of the farm-house where he lodges, wondering in which room he sits, in which room he sleeps of nights, while he, you know, is busy over his rent-rolls in his office in those sunny hours. Nature and the power of life in her and the power of hope and love in her are stronger than the wasteful, heartless yearnings that consume her soul and life because they have no oil of assurance where-

withal to maintain their flame. Then in the latter end of August came Mrs. Marshall, mother of this accountant, to spend a week with her son before harvest began, for on their hill-lying farm harvest came late even in genial seasons like this one.

She was a pleasant old matron, womanly, motherly. She had little to occupy her during her son's office hours, and therefore she spent most of those hours with her old neighbours, the Misses Stewart. She was, of course, very proud of her son, not in an unreasonable, foolish way, but in that quiet, satisfied, glad way that calms and widens a mother's judgment through her heart's fulness of assurance of her children's worth. Thus she had been with them for a number of pleasant days, talking much of her William and his prospects, speaking much also of his goodness, speaking mostly of him to Aileen. Aileen as an invalid engaged her most, you know. Aileen could not venture to speak much of the man's goodness in response; but Mrs. Marshall knew, knew by trembling voice and moistening eye of her, that her heart was full of a sense of her William's worth. She had no petty jealousy, this mother, that a poor maiden like one of these might steal her son from her.

But one day she came to them, to Aileen lying on her couch in the forenoon, resting before she undertook the fatigue of a walk, came with mysterious nods and smiles, which dimpled on her happy old face in a way that seemed to say, "I know all about it, and am not

displeased, as you may see." She had been to the village with William, and of course began speedily to talk of him. And, by-and-by, she began in a happy way to chidingly speak of that son of hers as "close," and "secret-keeping," and so forth; and then she bent down to Aileen, saying, "He lat me ken he winna gang abraid alane, gin God sends him. Noo, which o' ye's tae gae wi' him?"

The blood flowed up to Aileen's face in crimson-heated torrent, and as suddenly streamed back again to her heart, leaving her pained and quivering as with chill of fever. She could not reply.

Annabel was darning a stocking, and she set it down upon her lap in the quietest way imaginable, while she said, "He'll get aither o' us he lik's, o' coorse, Mrs. Marshall; but which wad ye wish him tae tak'? Pit in a gude word for me." She said it with that sweet smiling simplicity of hers, that absence of emotion which seemed to say there was no heart loving within her.

"'Deed," said Mrs. Marshall, "I'll dae naething o' the kind, Annabel. Ye're a cauld, prood minx, han'some though ye be! If I hae a word tae say, I'll say it for saft-hairted Aileen. She's mair tae ma taste, lassie."

"Weel, am vera willin' tae be yer dochter, mem," answered Annabel, laughing. "Surely, ye'll tell him sae muckle whatever."

"Tell him it yersel, if ye're mindit tae. I'll tak' care I winna! An' I think ma lad's thinkin' lik' me."

Aileen lay pale and sick the while they talked;

but her blood bounded and flowed again when the mother said that she thought her lad's thoughts were like hers, and that these were of her, Aileen. But she could not speak, could not even form a definite thought. She must simply lie and feel, until the changed conversation of those two gave her time to calm down and to collect sufficient energy to arise and go out on the arm of the mother. There was no doubt about the maternal preference for the weaker sister, and the mother tells her to get well for the sake of the emigrant son. There are health and strength in her kindly words.

It seems strange to me talking thus of this period, week by week, that none of those around her took a serious view of her illness, felt no apprehension of untoward result of it. Annabel was strong and healthy, you know, and entirely accustomed to her sister's pensive, tearful, soft ways, and thought—quite naturally, I daresay—that she rather liked to lie down and have a cry, quite naturally believed that "a good shaking" would have been fitting and effectual cure for her, if she had had heart to administer it. Counsellor Stewart, too, now happy in his occupation, happy in his family arrangements, happy in himself and his well-doing, seeing every day too his dearest daughter, would always say that it was nought but the outcome of her overwork at that Whitsunday last by-past. He knew she was now able to go out every good day. He did not see her frequent changes of mood and colour, for when he was present the matters that used to prompt

those changes seldom approached her. He always declared, "She's impruvin' fine," and in his sanguine way he undoubtedly believed it. To William Marshall's eye alone did there appear actual danger in this illness, the special origin of which he did not guess at, the special forms of which perplexed him. Therefore he was solicitous for her, tender towards her, ever prompt to show her of his regard. He used to come to the cottage every night after tea, and to bring his flute with him, playing the old tunes of old days, while the girls sewed up things for the decoration of their home, such as cushions of wool for the seats of the cane-bottomed chairs, which were the chairs of their little parlour, being really bed-room things worth four shillings and sixpence a-piece; but which, when covered with these cushions, and with "cotton stripe," made the little room look as furnished handsomely. Annabel, of course, was the chief seamstress now, for Aileen but languidly plied her needle, often pausing to sigh forth great sighs. Yet she would sometimes brighten up when he came, sometimes even gather strength to sing "Oft in the stilly night," or some such thing, doing it with that soft, wooing, Doric voice of hers, in such wise as made little words greatly affecting. Annabel would say, "Ye sing sae plaintif, Aileen, ye mak' me fit tae cry." As for Aileen, she was so habituated to emotion, had so trained herself to suppress it when Marshall was present, that save in the plaintive voice, in her gay hours with him, you could not know that body and

soul of her were oppressed and distressed as they were. When he went away on those autumnal evenings, Aileen would lay herself tired and languid on the little couch, but Annabel went with him to the gate to see him clear off the premises, you know, as a friend might do, who had no fear of the night air. Who knows what words are whispered beside the little gate, under the twinkling stars, roguishly twinkling but ever silent! Well, I know, but it is not of my story to tell.

Mr. William Marshall is sent for to meet in Edinburgh certain gentlemen about that Tasmanian managership. He has gone away, and blank desolation has settled down on the soul of Aileen, lonely in a world that ought to have been pleasant to her, racked by keenest anxiety that set her heart a-beating in violent commotion, by some dread fear that she had not defined, sought not to define; but which, when it came upon her, chilled her through soul and body, and checked the throb of her blood-gorged heart. Was not the hour approaching when he would tell her the secret which hitherto he had kept hid from her within himself, which she was dying because she heard it not, and yet dreaded to hear? With pain and panting, she pined through the days of his absence, until she received a little note from him, very kind and loving towards them all. He had got the appointment, £700 a year and a liberal allowance for outfit and passage, and he must sail on 1st November. He would return to them immediately.

The Counsellor was radiant, elated, as was right and natural, at the success of his true friend. "Hoorah!" he cried, when he came in to dinner. "Willie Marshall deserves it a'! There is ne'er a cleverer chiel nor a kinder hairt 'twixt this an Embro.' Gude grant him muckle happiness!" Annabel received the news very quietly, even gravely. Aileen lay down on her couch to calm herself, could eat no part of the little dinner, so full she was of the tidings. But when Annabel had removed and washed up the dishes, the father having gone out, she, Annabel, would write a letter to old Mrs. Marshall to congratulate her, and she did it calmly, as if the news were but of ordinary import, as if she was simply gratified in a dear friend's success in life—calmly, while Aileen lay trying to still her foolish heart, succeeding in it not at all.

Then Annabel dressed to go to the village to post the letter. She would bring home some steel drops for Aileen. She was standing on the floor saying so when she gave a little delighted scream, and cried, "There's Marshall, I declare! How can he hae come?" and she ran into the porch to meet him. He had come to Inverwick, not "on the wings of love," but by the same mail-coach as his letter, and at mid-day had hired a conveyance on to the village. Aileen raised herself feebly on her elbow. She could not get up to receive him. She heard him kiss Annabel in the porch, and saw him enter the little parlour making his explanations of his unexpected appearance. She scarcely knew when

he came to her softly inquiring for her, and tenderly kissing her. He was in high spirits. He had only just reached the village, but could not rest till he had run to them. He would go to the village with Annabel, as he ought to call at the office, but he would return with her in a little to comfort the ailing Aileen, whom he kissed then again. And, raised on her elbow to stare through the cottage window after him, she saw him go out with Annabel and along the garden walk, talking gravely. Then he stopped and hurried back to her. She sank down almost fainting at his coming.

"I have come to tell you my secret now, Aileen, dear. It must do you good, must make you well. I have kept it for four years. Now I can tell it freely, for my hopes are turning into facts, and you must get well to make the facts wholly happy." She was listening with all her soul in that poor face of hers. She shut her eyes and held her breath when he said she was needed for his happiness; but he went on: "Annabel is going with me as my long-plighted wife. I am sure you will be both pained and pleased. Now, you see, you must get well." He kissed her again, as she lay silent and motionless, and hurried out to his bride.

The lovers went together in their happiness to the village, and near to the office they found that sage official, Ground-Officer Stewart, whom Marshall hailed. "I want your advice, O Counsellor, but I'll pay no fee."

"What's that aboot?" asked Mr. Stewart.

"I am to take this young lady abroad with me.

She's quite willing to go, but I want your opinion of it."

Stewart opened his eyes, and took off his hat, and puffed out his cheeks, and blew out a great breath. "God bliss ye, Willie! If ye wanted the pair o' them, and they would gae wi' ye, I'd mak' ye welcome." And he grasped the young man's hand and wrung it, and wrung his daughter's hand thereafter, and looked very foolish and like to cry.

They arranged to go back together to Aileen. In half an hour Marshall would be free to go; and very joyously they returned to the cottage, with their happiness beaming in their faces, rounding and mellowing their voices, and filling and warming their hearts. The September sunshine was abroad and bright, and the corn-laden earth was warm and pleasant as they. They entered the cottage. Aileen was still lying on the couch, turned to the wall and her face pressed to the pillow. Marshall cried gaily as he entered, "Come, Aileen, you must now wish us joy!" But Aileen answered not. He went to her, put his hand on her shoulder; but she moved not. He drew her face towards him, disclosing his photograph in the brooch held by her left hand upon the pillow. Her lips were pressed to it, clung heavily to it as he drew them away. He saw it; and the whole truth flashed on him, and he cried out in anguish, for Aileen was dead.

JAMPHLIN' JAMIE.

CHAPTER I.

IS it not an absurdity to describe the person and fortunes of a creature like this? *Cui bono?* Well; I do admit that he is somewhat grotesque, such goodness as is of him being mostly hidden away in one of the unclean crannies which are the lurking-places—the homes—of so many of our race. But if you, O reader, find delightful occupation, and wise reflection, and much insight into creative goodness and what not, while contemplating drops of stagnant water through a microscope; if you find that employment not only rational, but enjoyable and profitable, may I not be allowed my poor pleasure in tracing the disjuncted life-ways of this poor specimen of humanity? Surely no human life is lived wholly in vain, if man is in any degree that special *protégé* of Heaven which you and I are fain to believe him.

Jamphlin' Jamie! I see him almost every summer evening, when I go forth to seek health and pleasure in the sunshine modified by vesperian south wind, for

my favourite walk is out beyond the lane where his bothy stands. He is now a squatly-built man, strong enough of bone and sinew, five feet five inches in height, and well enough to look upon, saving for his tawny, unwashed skin, and saving also his legs, and his mode of progression with them. His unwashed griminess he shares with his neighbours. His speciality lies in his legs, which are slightly bent below the knee and have the feet turned, also outward, at an angle approximate to 90°. Furthermore, his feet are flat and ungainly, although not by any means to the extent of deformity. Yet the first glance at these limbs of his impresses you with a certain conviction that his mode of walking must be peculiar. In fact, it is peculiar. He drags his feet along rather than lifts them, as if they were heavily weighted with a boot loosely fitting enough to drop off if the foot were raised in the ordinary way. Hence his name "Jamphlin' Jamie."

He is bullet-headed, with a large square face, rude nose, and large mouth, having thin, projected lips. His eyes are not bad, and there is a large look in his face of simplicity and good-heartedness—perhaps, large-heartedness. Like many good-hearted folk, he is garrulous, and fain to speak a wisdom which is not in him. Therefore he quotes Scripture largely; and brings to his hearer's assurance anon and ever the allegation that "he was weel broucht up himsel'." However he may have been trained, this I know that his heart is

right; and much I honour his simple heart and nature. Strong-headed, clear-headed I cannot maintain him to be; indeed, his intellect seems mostly seated in his heart. Honest, loyal, and laborious, I esteem him, and my esteem takes a quality of reverence for him when I remember his generosity, his self-denying temperance, his desire to conform to God's will and way. Yet can I not hide from myself, nor from you, O reader, the many incongruities that his weak head works out in the character of the untrained man; how his self-esteem has led him into false positions, and how not seldom he has sustained his simple faith with texts misinterpreted, and guided a good life, a sincere life, on a misconstruction of what is written. Indeed, goodness and nonsense are so inextricably bound up in him that I reverence and also I laugh. No doubt his grotesque exterior has much to do with this confusion of regard and laughter. I saw him last night in the lane, "forenent" his cottage, dandling and tossing about his youngest bairn, in a way that was alarming enough, while he grotesquely capered and leaped about on those limbs of his. At length, he got the child's legs twisted round his neck, leaping in the absurdest style, to the manifest danger of the boy, till the women, squatted at their doors in the evening sunshine, cried, "See till the 'gomeril! He'll be the death o' the bairn! Rin, Betsey, for horsel'!"

Just then I approached, and Jamie drew toward me. "Nursing, Jamie?"

"Ay; jist daffin' a bit wi' the bairnie!"

"Quite jolly?"

"Ay, ay, jolly enuch! The nicht's gude; the wife's makin' suppar, which is better; an' the weans are a' brawly, which is best o' a'. Happy is the man that hath his quiver feel o' them! Am no ashaimed i' the gate! What for shud I be?"

Thereupon from the door of Jamie's habitation emerged a little shock head of red hair, followed by a body scantily clothed, bare-legged and bare-footed, the eldest of Jamie's quiverful, as I knew. The urchin advanced a step or two into the lane and then shouted, "Jamie, Bell's ca'in' ye in for yer mait."

"The Lord's gude! suppar is ready!" said Jamie piously, starting towards the door.

"But, Jamie," said I, thoughtlessly interfering where I ought not, "how do you let the bairns call your wife and you 'Jamie' and 'Bell?' You should train them to respect you, I think."

"'Deed ye're richt, 'deed ye're richt, man! Am no mindin' things a' times! I wus weel broucht up masel'!" and incontinently he smote the shock head a great skelp with his palm, saying, "Children, obey your parents, for that is weel-plaisin'!" and he followed the astonished and screeching youngster into the cottage.

You see that the life of Jamphlin' Jamie is not without its wellsprings of pleasure. His husbandhood, his fatherhood, are to this humble man as much, nay, more,

than the proud nuptials and alliances of lords, and these, with labour, are the main facts of his existence. To me his pleasure in them seems as worthy of contemplation as the serene and polished gracefulness of the home-life of grandees, who know but little, as I fear, of the poor man's soul-contentment evidenced in that brief speech: "The Lord's gude! Suppar is ready!" That happy acquiescence which we call contentment is mainly the fountain of the poor man's pleasure in life.

Jamie was twelve years of age when first I knew him. Then he was, as was right and fitting, under tutors and governors in the shape of his natural guardians, undergoing, as I presume, that upbringing which he ceases not to pronounce excellent. Goodness knows, its excellence was hard to discover; for his father was "Cobbler Howden," whose name was a bye-word in the village, and his ways a stumbling-block and reproach to it. For the "Cobbler" had in early days been prominent before the people as a Sunday-school teacher, a young man powerful in praise and prayer. But he had fallen from his first estate, so far and so long that his reprobation was forgotten in his habitual and notorious drunkenness and idleness. He would not work. He said working hurt him. And, indeed, poor man, his was a condition of misery as well as sin. He was afflicted with some disorder which made sitting and stooping, such as he must be subjected to in following his craft, irritating and painful. This

made him also crave relief from the whisky stoup, which, you know, will give relief only on condition that you suffer still further enhancement of your cravings, when the measure is emptied. It was only on rare days however, that the poor man could get a dram, for his distaste of labour or incapacity for it had this result, it checked his indulgence. He had long ago so proved himself unworthy of reliance that nobody would trust him even with a pair of shoes to sole. The magnitude of the job prevented him from beginning it. It was his utmost effort to clout rudely an old shoe while its owner sat by him with the two or three coppers of ready fee. His longest sitting was induced by the promise of a dram at noon. Such was the male parent of my poor friend, Jamie.

What goodness could there be in the training of a sire like that? Excellence is much a matter of opinion, I would observe, and wholly contingent on the point of view. And without doubt the inner life of the most besotted and worthless of idlers, must have in it some redeeming qualities, not sufficient I dare say to atone for faults persisted in from day to day, but enough to make companionship in the misery he courts and entails bearable for those who suffer with him. Cobbler Howden was indeed a sad scamp and bad father, yet he was not wholly bad. How often he sat down at his hungry hearth, wringing his hands and bemoaning his fate, it were bootless to recount; bootless all the more that usually he would blame Heaven or Hell or things

in general for having "welted" body and life of him so that it was hard to live. It was sad, even solemn, sometimes to hear him cry out to his young son to "tak' warnin' o' me, a broken-down puir sinner, wha forshook the Lord an' his ways tae wallow in ma ain unrighteousness, until ma ain misdeeds hae left me bare an' nakit, meeserable an' stairvin', wi' ye, puir tentless loun, an' yer stairvin' teethless grannie." Sad too, was it at times for the youth to hear this father cry out of the happiness of her, his mother, who lay quietly resting in the kirk-yard, undisturbed by the sins or sufferings of him whose early piety and promise had won her maiden love. Chiefly the boy knew his father's care of him by the random cuffs and whacks which for slender causes were freely bestowed.

Jamie's mother was dead, dead so long that his father's rare outcry but faintly woke an echo and no aching in the boy's heart. He was not sensitive, and, at any rate, the event was old, and he was young; and thus it was sorrowful to him only because at mention of her dead daughter, old grannie would "croon and greet" by the cold ingle, and, in her toothless, palsied way, wish she too was "wi' Abbrawhaum."

And no wonder was it that she thus wished and longed, for toilsome and cheerless and weary was the way that she traversed, cowering and soul-crushed, wending her way to her cold home—the grave. Mainly, she was the stay of this poor household, for the Parochial Board paid her one shilling per week,

and the law, and the degradation of it, notwithstanding, she would put on her old, old cloak, with its plain hood and its fluted shoulder-plaits, that old black cloak that "was a gude black cloak what time her man died, thritty-five years syn'," and underneath it she would string to her her "meal pock" and wander forth to beg, to beg for this wretched son-in-law, and the boy, her grandson. Thus it was that the "puir chiel laddie" was mostly fed. There was a day, long since, when "the auld wife beggar" did not think that she should come to this, when bright eyes flashed from a fair and rosy face dimpled with the smiles of youth, and life was fresh, and fain to anticipate, and no thought was of cold poverty, or of old age back-bent and grimy, or of the grave. Which one of us can forecast his future? Thank God that, the present evil being enough for the day, we have not anticipation of, and cannot reckon the ailings and the evils beyond.

But solely in the tutelage of this old woman was there any foundation in fact for Jamie's assertion that he was well brought up. Indeed, she was esteemed "a godly auld womman," and had in reverence, perhaps a superstitious reverence for age and poverty, by the families whose commiseration she excited, whose alms she carried away to the gaunt garret, her home. There was a spirit of gentle meekness in her approaches and her solicitations, a sweet-voiced thankfulness in her acknowledgments, a quiet fervour in the blessings besought for her benefactors, that begot the notion that

she was near to the heart and eye of the Highest, was fed with rich things from His table, although thus, in her sun-greened covering and in lowliness, she begged for the bread that perisheth that she and hers might live their allotted span of living misery.

Her profession of godliness was in truth no cloak for hypocrisy. The grinding of poverty, the death after death of those whose lives bound her to life and helped to make life tolerable for her, were enough and more than enough to drive any soul from the sadness of the present for hope and comfort in the life unseen. And in proportion to the present desolateness, there being no loving eye to pity, no tender hand to help—for even when most considerate of her, still the hand of charity was cold to feel—her eye the more strained through the mist that enveloped her poor life, seeking the face of Him, whose pity is everlasting for the poor and the needy.

She would speak much to the boy, her grandchild, our Jamphlin' Jamie, of the things that concern the life to come, too much perhaps for best effect, ever speaking of the water and the bread of life, while she gave him his sup of porridge made from the gleanings in her wallet, or satisfied his hunger in the afternoon with the cold potatoes carried by her from distant farm-houses. Too much she may have talked of the future she lived and longed for, for boyhood will eat its porridge or potato, nor be much troubled by the accidents of how they came or how they are eaten, not

feeling much the mendicancy which procures them, nor valuing greatly the spoon even of silver wherewith they may be supped. And as for the world to come, boyhood mostly has a nearer boundary of thought. "Whan am big I'll wark for ye, grannie, an' for puir faither!" The near-lying field of the life that is was enough for the material hopes of this boy of poverty.

He was a pale-faced boy, whose appearance gave you an impression that he had suffered injury of the spine, that the diverging feet of him and "shochlin'" gait of him had thence resulted. But I do not think he had any tendency to spine disease. His thin white face and feebleness were amply accounted for, by the many hard days of cold, and by many scanty meals irregularly given him, barely sustaining the boy-life of him. Perhaps, too, his vital force was weakened by the unhealthy knowledge of his father's wayward life, by the daily listening to his plaints that would take no cognizance of the grandmother's sources of comfort, for he would hourly say that God and the Bible were the inventions of the priests, that there was no Providence to rule and reign, and he was ready to curse and die, while, meantime, he longed, terribly longed for a dram. "Grannie" was mostly silent before the father, only now and again lifting up her voice to maintain that the "Lord reigneth," so that the man's soul might not be required at her hand. It was chiefly during the father's wanderings from the garret that she spoke to the pale-faced boy of the things of God. As for

Jamie's shuffling gait and out-turned feet, they had more natural explanation in the facts of his upbringing than in any actual physical ailment. The father could provide him no clothes, would not work for the procurement of clothes or shoes for the boy. Thus to cover his nakedness and to shield his feet from winter snows, the grandmother had to beg odd cast-off garments and old worn-out shoes. The shoes she got were not only dilapidated but heavy and large, and thus I think his weak limbs were twisted into the incongruous shapes that are permanent to them now.

He had never been to school. His sire could not afford the penny a week needed to pay for education, would make no effort to provide it. If he had a penny, it went all too speedily for a "glass," for these were the good times, still bemoaned by some, when a gill of whisky was sold for threepence. But the old grandmother had taught the boy the A, B, C, and in a desultory way, of summer evenings, had coached him up to words of four letters. It was her great ambition that he should be able to read the Testament "afore she was called;" but the work had been late of beginning, and now he was twelve years old, and earnestly longing to "git awa tae herd or tae dae onything," bent on deserting the old grandame who so cared for him.

Why linger over his aspirations to quit the garret and go out to the hill sides and green fields, and to do such work as he was fit for to make certain of his food? He did go out, and he found the world by no means un-

pleasant and the people of it kindly disposed. If they were not solicitous about the welfare of louns such as he, at least they were ready to accord them full measure of fair play, specially willing that if they worked they should also eat, yea, eat abundantly. And this boy, being earnest of mind and willing in his service, won more readily, in respect of his grotesque limbs and their scanty covering, that consideration of the farmer-mind which was laudably satisfied in cramming him with food. He ran about all summer barefooted, and became strong on his coarse but full fare, so that he boasted, "Ye maunna jeer at me! I can loup as far as black Bob, the horseman, an' that's mair nor twa three can dae." Jeer at him, of course, some thick-witted ploughman would; but, notwithstanding, swiftly fled the summer days, and the days of autumn, too, until the grain sheaves were all in the stack-yard, and the cattle beasts were free to wander from the hill pasture to the stubble fields and to feed and straggle at their wills over the length and breadth of the farm.

Then it was time for the boy to depart. But he had no disposition to go, having but cold thoughts of the garret of his childhood in the village six miles away. Twice he had visited it in this eight months' absence, and twice had one of its inmates come to him—first his grandmother. She came with old cloak and wallet, "tae spier aifter the loun," to beg a blessing for him and his employers, and for herself to carry away such portion of meal or other food as they might bestow.

They sent her away not empty, but being hard of mind and full of comfort, they valued not much the blessing she entreated and lightly esteemed her in the entreaty. Poor Jamie saw and felt nought but pleasure in the old woman's visit, and thought not at all that, in the eyes of his fellow-servants, men and maidens, it affected his position. Yet, no doubt, it did affect him, establishing "the auld beggar wife's oye" in their eyes as an object for contemptuous pity. What mattered that, since, if possible, they were kinder than before?

Again, when the yellow grain was nodding to the sickle and the boy's term was drawing nigh, his father sought him on the outlying pasture, where the speckled cows straggled with their followers in listless fulness in the autumn afternoon. Although he came not with smiles and words of cheerful thanksgiving for the finding of his boy safe and well, yet was the boy glad to see him, and was happy the while that they sat together on the hill-side in the sunshine, while the father asked questions about the ways of the place and about his master. It was but a brief interview. "Cam' wi' me tae the maister?" said the sire, ending it.

"I daurna," said the herd. "Gin ma back wus turned, ilka ane o' the beastes wad mak' for the stooks, for a' they be sae douse an' me afore them."

So the father went his ways.

By-and-by, he strolled back again, and the farmer came from the steading to the cowherd on the hill-side when he had visited the reapers. "Jamie," said

he, "your father seeks your pound fée. Are you willing that I shall give it to him?" Now, to the boy this pound had been for the six months of servitude a special and mysterious guerdon awaiting him. A pound! He had never so much as seen one, had no notion at all that it was no more than an uncleanly bit of paper such as is the ordinary currency of our fatherland. He had no special notion about it, but a pound worked for and won must be surely some large and bright and pleasure-giving thing. Therefore, it was sore to him that he was not to see it, not to handle it after all. Of course, if he had got it, he would have carried it home intact, and put it at the disposal of father or grannie. But not to see it at all was very hard, and so he replied not. "Cam', tell me, Jamie," quoth the farmer, kindly.

"Spake, ye little deevil!" said the father, seizing his shoulder and shaking him.

"Ay," said the boy, gulping down his sorrow.

"You're willing then that I shall pay him?"

"Ay," said the boy again; and seeing the brandered cow disposed to wander to the stubble, as yet forbidden ground, he left the men there and set off to the erring one, both that he might gulp down his vexation and that he might do his duty. His father finally departed without speaking to him again. The boy saw him no more.

Cobbler Howden got the boy's pound note from the farmer. It was long, long years since his hand had

held one before, and his heart leaped within him, and a wild elasticity seized his limbs as he actually ran from the farm with that treasure. He was well exhausted before he reached the little public-house at Easter Howe, into the dirty tap-room of which he entered. The room was unoccupied and he sat down, and there alone he had a great spiritual conflict with himself. The pound note was so precious that he was very loath to change it, and yet his soul cried lustily for a dram. If he had but one penny! If he had, he could certainly have gone on at least to the village before converting the note into drink and coins less valued.

But having no penny, his better man gave way; and failing heart and flesh were invigorated with a dram. What, now, if all this copper "change," of little value save as commutable into drams, should undergo transmutation? Well, it was long since he had had a plentiful drink, and he resolved to quaff freely from the glad spring thus freely streaming for him. In the shades of evening, he staggered from the door of "the public" and passed off upon the road into the darkness. Into the darkness truly, for when the morning light had come again, by the road side, in the little trinkling brooklet called the Burn o' Howe, with scarcely half an inch of water on its pebbles, there lay his corpse, face down in the water. A shepherd, driving a score of lambs to the county town, was the first to find it, and the wretched father was buried, before the farm

people, acting, no doubt, with the kindliest of motives, told the boy that he was dead. So dull and leaden of head and heart was Jamie, that he scarcely wept for his loss. Perhaps humanity must needs be heavy and hard to move to evidence of emotion, when the cow-herd is but twelve, and hardship and penury have mostly moulded his nature.

The farmer let him stay till Hallowe'en, and sooth to say, he had no eager craving for his "home," even when his heart faintly glowed at thoughts of his old grandmother. But at Hallowe'en he must depart, for it was not compatible with the farmer's notions of economy to feed even one mouth where service was not given in return. Thus the boy found his way back to the village, and taking advantage of a cart that also went thither, he carried with him a goodly sack of hazel nuts, collected in the autumn. On the advice of the grieve, he offered them for sale to the merchant and was made glad with half-a-crown and an ounce of snuff. O, wonder of wealth and of snuff, it seemed, which he carried straightway to the garret, and gave all to her who best knew its value, specially esteeming the "snee-shin," titillating gift of the ragged orphan grandchild.

CHAPTER II.

It may be hard to believe, but still the truth was, that his rags and orphanage and all the misery con-

comitant, sat lightly on Jamie, all excepting the old woman's never-ceasing exhortations and expositions. If there is much human misery, let us be glad to think that we, who do not suffer, looking on, see the signs and symptoms of distress much more distinctly and as more grievous than the sufferers feel them. Humanity is peculiar in this. When the lower creatures are writhed by pain, we may measure their evil case by the extent and frequence of contortion. So too when man is in corporeal agony. But as to how man bears his rags, or the dirt that seems unalienable from rags, your eye, or mine, O reader, is no safe criterion. We see the squalor and the tatters, and involve ourselves in them, with all our preconceptions of what the misery of them must be; forgetting that many an empty stomach is proximate to a brave heart, and many an old coat covers a back that will bend only to labour. Those treat emptiness and hunger with quiet contempt, strange for us to contemplate who are fed delicately; these feel no disgrace in rags, attaching no importance to purple or fine linen. Indeed, much of the hardship and evil of poverty has existence only in the misconception of the rich. Poverty has pain chiefly for those whose standard of comfort has been elevated and cultivated.

Thus the boy felt not his evil case so badly as the narrative of it might lead us to expect. Chief evil of his lot it was that he must believe that, just as his father before him certainly was, so he also might be a son of evil predestined to be damned eternally. Nay,

even the fear of being damned might not have had serious effect on him, had it not been clothed with the assurance of such suffering as was most sensibly recognised in the conception of burning everlastingly. This was the great and terrible thing of life for him, pressed home with earnest urgency by the old crone, whose own mind was at rest in the happy assurance, that if in this life she was subjected to evil things, in the life to come perpetual blessings awaited her. With trembling steps Jamie followed her now to new exhibition of her lowliness, to nearer access, as no doubt she thought it, to the throne of the Highest.

Once and again in the lifetime of her son-in-law, she had adventured, in her black cloak, and in the spirit of piety and humility that she so much cultivated, to set herself up in the face of the congregation, to draw the eyes of the Christian people upon her, by mounting the pulpit stair and seating herself on the topmost step. But once and again that irreligious Cobbler had stopped repetition of this for the time, by swearing fearfully and threatening all manner of evils temporal both to her and himself. Now, that obstacle being removed, when the boy went with her to church, straightway she led him up the aisle and up the pulpit stair and set him down before the people. Indeed he did not relish it, for he thought that the eyes of all the people were on him; while very few thought of him or reckoned his being there at all, and certainly none but those whose opinion he need not have minded. Yet did

the louns whom he encountered in the streets and at the corners of the way, jeer at him as the "pu'pit bird" and ironically call him "the parson," and otherwise deride his elevation. Through fear of the devil and his sense of the contumely, the boy was both commoved and perplexed. As too often happens, the devil being the more distant power, was less effective as a deterrent than the scoffs of the village imps. Perhaps, however, there was some truth in Jamie's own statement of the matter, that the "deil," in his rage for him as a victim, actually put into his heart a contempt for what he—the deil—could do, and stirred him "tae flee the kirk an' tae desert his puir auld grannie." By all that I know or that is known of the ways and wiles of the arch-enemy of mankind, Jamie's statement may be correct. This at least was the fact, that Jamie forsook his garret and grannie and fled next Sunday morning when he had supped his dry porridge.

Fled whither? Is not the world wide? No doubt of it; but why should we follow him in those days of wandering, confined wholly to Glenaldie or Howe or Langrig? Suffice it that he underwent many days of pinching cold, and had many strange bed-fellows, although mostly his belly suffered not, before the day when, being seventeen years of age, he was engaged as a regular "halflin'," at the farm of Lower Banks, in the parish last named. In the interval he had not wholly wrought for nought. When in the first winter, he found, at last, after much wandering, a resting place

and work, feeding nowt and howking turnips for their feeding, his fee was but a pair of shoes and his meals. But then summer came, and he remained to herd and do odd jobs for thirty shillings and his food. Now his wage was four pounds ten for the six months.

And here it would be unfair were I to omit to mention, that the poor boy never got wages into hand of his but forthwith he repaired to the distant village, sought again the cheerless garret and the grandmother therein who still would prate and pray after the way that he had fled from, and to her he gave full half of his money, and "an offering of sneeshin forbye." It would almost seem as if an instinct moved him, a good and happy instinct no doubt it must be, which fills many lowly hearts, to do and to find pleasure in doing the thing which must most accord with the Will of the great Ruler of Mankind, who will have mercy rather than sacrifice, but who esteems loving acts of mercy most in the self-sacrifice of the actor.

It was greatly to Jamie's advantage, that he now "took on service," or was engaged, at Lower Banks. Mackenzie, the farmer, was an elderly man, an elder also of the church in Langrig, while, at the same time, he was reputed one of the best farmers in the Strath. He was a tall and powerful man, "a fine judge" of horse or beast, and ready to vaunt his skill in this particular. He said that he generally selected a beast by its eye. He was famous also for his skilful and willing servants, and, possibly, he chose them also by their eyes. Indeed,

judged by any other organ or point of him, poor Jamie could scarcely have been selected. Mr. Mackenzie, although he had a powerful frame, had but a weak and wheezing voice; yet it was his supreme delight to exercise it twice a day (seed-time and harvest always excepted) in family devotion, to which all the unmarried servants were gathered, so that he had quite a little congregation. On Sunday evenings also he would examine them in their knowledge of the Shorter Catechism, and hear them read long passages of the Gospels, "verse about." Wherein consisted the advantage of this to Jamie, who had at earlier stages of his life fled from the like? It lay in this, that the farmer finding that Jamie was in the bonds of ignorance, committed it to the charge of his son to instruct him in reading and writing.

Jamie's attainments in these high arts have never brought him much gain, the standard to which he attained being but lowly. It was still a good thing for him to learn, saving, as it did, his after life from the disgrace of being unable to read his Bible in his household, the doing of which in these his maturer years is both matter of faith and duty with him, matter of pleasure and solace also now that he is the stem of many branches. Like every good thing the acquisition of the power to read was painful and laborious; not the less so that while his brother yokels were daffing and chaffing or lazily smoking after supper, at half-past six he must grudgingly go from them, taunted by them as

the "skule boy," and grind at his letters and pot hooks for a full hour each evening.

In this service he remained for two years, until he was nineteen, still serving in the capacity of halfling, with only a halfling's fee. His occasion of quitting it is worthy of record. It was that dread November when our soldiers were dying in the wintry snows of the Crimea and many homes were filled with mourning, homes in every corner of the land. Even our distant Strath was not without its mourners, and one of the victims was a nephew of farmer Mackenzie, a smart serjeant in a Highland Regiment. There were four lads, all much of the same age as Jamie, on this farm of Lower Banks and on the adjoining farm of Kilgrew, and these four with Jamie meeting over the bothy fire at night, each with his terrible legend of the battle-field and of the protracted siege, then and there made up their minds not to engage for farm service after the term of Martinmas approaching, but forthwith on the term day to start right away for Inverwick to seek the service of their Queen and country. Truth to say, Jamie had some hesitation about this. "Gudesakes! what 'll grannie dae? What if I'll be kilt?"

"Ye lurdane! ye can only dee ainee!" said one.

"Ye may be prood if they tak' a jamphlin' craitar lik' ye," said another.

"Be sure they 'll tak' him! They 'll tak' us a', for they're gay straited for lads. Least if they kent Jamie's mettle wi' a pitchfork, they'd no keep a gun

frae him. He'll dae as weel 's the lave o' us tae be shot at."

So the matter was settled; and, on the term day, the five lads set forth, their humble hearts fired by a spirit as brave as ever Roman or Briton might boast of, as ready to step into breach or gap, death-made, as noblest heroes might be. And, on the way, they must needs pass through the village, and Jamie sought the garret and the old woman of his boyhood and bade them both adieu, in that proud, peculiar spirit which must ever inspire the departing warrior, willingly going forth to encounter death and danger, certain of these, uncertain that he shall ever return.

The old woman was in sore distress, when she comprehended what the lad intended. "Ye're demented! Shurely ye're possessed! A puir loun lik' ye tae gae raivin' an' murtherin' wi' guns an' swyords tae the wars! What will ye dae i' the wars? Tak' yer grannie's advice an' bide at hame." But no; he was not to be turned from his lofty purpose, but he promised to fear the Lord in his warfare, "an' tae kill naebody but Roosheans." "They wha tak' the swyord shall perish by the swyord." What of that? he was ready for that issue. So with much crooning and many tears the old woman let him go, and proudly he marched forward to the town, with his comrades.

The little party sought their way to the recruiting station. It was late of the night, and they were footsore more or less all of them, for they had tramped

nearly thirty long miles rendered miry and ill to walk by winter's rain. They had come, too, from afar without food by the way, and much of the way they had traversed after night-fall. Yet the little band, when the Serjeant brought them in and set them in the flaring gas light, bravely held up their heads and stood as erect as was permitted by their youth of toil and the bundle of clothing bound up in red cotton napkin which each of them carried in his hand. Jamie, you know, had the additional difficulty of his legs. The Serjeant praised the bold spirit of the volunteers, and kindly entreated them, providing them with supper and billets for the night, and the young soldiers soundly slept, their course of warfare being so far begun. Next day, to his intense chagrin, Jamie was rejected by the inspecting surgeon. "If it haed na been that Jock Swanson was turned aff as weel as me, I'd hae drowndit masel, I declare! Tae be thocht nae worth powthar an' shot! gude sakes, it wus vera hummlin'," Jamie has said to me. "It wus five year, an' the war wus a' over an' dead, afore I daured tae show ma face tae the folk that kent me afore. If they had taen me, wha kens what I micht be the day! Ane o' them is a gineral or some braw craitar lik' that noo, as am telt. But he's no married yet for a', while I hae a wife an' am a faither! The Lord guides us a' his ain gait; an' whan I seed that men sae lichtly esteemed me," said the poor fellow, "I mindit what grannie said, an' I turned mair till the Lord. I wusna a hair the waur tae grannie, I ken."

His next appearance amongst us was at the feeing market, in April, 1859. The village Square was thronged, as it always is on such occasions, with a mass of rustics, men and girls, of all classes. It was mid-day when he arrived, for he had come from far. He wanted to hire his thews and sinews in the old Strath, from which the fear of ridicule had kept him so long an exile, pained and yearning for the places so well known of him. And it being mid-day, and he desirous to fee, he straightway mingled in the throng, hoping to engage himself before he sought out his grandmother.

The five or six years of his absence had wrought a great change on the throng. Whereas in former years he would have found in it scores of "kent faces" to greet him and be greeted by him, scarcely one could he now recognise. Some of the employers of labour, the farmers, he did know, and "his hairt wus gled" to see the accustomed faces of them, and "them sae brave an' stoot, sae muckle stooter than ere he gaed awa'." But the youth were all changed, and the hiring women all changed, and there was not a soul to bid him welcome to Strath or village again. "It wad hae been jist the same," said he to himself, "if I had shipped awa' tae the wars an' been kilt, like puir Jock Fairbairn. Ne'er a ane wad hae haid thoucht o' me i' the land whaur I wus born!" Being still disengaged at two o'clock, he went to seek his grandame.

He found his way to the old garret, but the door

was shut. He raised the latch and entered as of old, for the door had no lock. Everything was as last he had seen it; indeed, as it had been when, a boy, he had cowered beside the hearth, cheerless then as now. He sat down on the wee bit stool on which long ago he used to rest, and, perhaps he was weary and dejected, he covered his face with his hands and began to cry. He has told me, "I didna ken what for I wus greetin'. But there wus the auld bed whaur faither an' me sleepit, an' there wus grannie's muckle pouch, frae which she aft tuk' the grainie meal for ma parritch an' me a witless bairn, an' it a' cam' upon me, an' I cudna but cry, for I feelt masel' lane an' deeslate i' the land." He sat there, and had his cry out; and, as the old woman came not, he went forth again to the throng. He "didna ken the bairnies that war playin' on the stair. Ilka thing wus sae chainged. It was guid tae ken the Lord wadna chainge!"

But before the day had gone much further, he was engaged as a ploughman at the Bught, and had met his grandmother, soliciting halfpence, as it was her nature to do, and he made her poor old heart glad with the news of his return to her neighbourhood. It seems that he had regularly sent her, by divers channels, two pounds each half year, so that with the parish dole she should have been above want, certainly in no need to beg halfpence; but I dare say custom goes far to make nature in all things. It materially helped Jamie to an engagement that he was not—

as so many of the Strath lads then were—a militia-man.

At Whitsunday he went home to the Bught, and found himself very comfortable. He was lodged in the bothy, a scantily-furnished room in the farm-steading, sitting-room and bed-room for him and three other "lads." It was swept and garnished for them by Meg Bruce, one of the field-women, who cooked their victuals and made their beds. Each man, you know, got an allowance of oatmeal and of milk, to be hained, or wasted, or sold, as he liked.

Naturally, at nights and at meal times, there was more or less chaffing among the men; and naturally, too, Meg Bruce often bore a share in it, and so came soon to know the dispositions of the men. She must have seen that Jamie was a prudent, sensible, saving chiel; and, for some reason which I know not, she cultivated his good opinion by sparing his meal-bag. In making the men's messes she always went to his bag last, and took but a scrimp handful. He was, no doubt, the eldest of the party, and therefore entitled to the greater consideration. It afterwards became evident that Meg was one of those facile women that lay themselves out for pleasing every male creature around them, each man after his own heart. It was long before Jamie discovered this, so he was very gracious to the lass. Indeed, each hind of them found, or fancied that he found, his own advantage in her, so that amid the chaffing there was no ill-will.

Jamie being a kindly creature, having in him much of a womanly nature, would show his appreciation of Miss Meg's worth by helping her in her duties. He would shake up his own "chaff-sack," and arrange the blankets of his bed, to save her trouble. He would rake out the peat ashes and heap on new fuel on the hearth while dressing; would even fetch in "a fraught" of water; all which the younger men thought it was most derogatory for manhood to do. Of course they would have it that he was actuated by stronger motives than mere courtesy. But, in all innocence and kindliness, he boldly persisted in his acts of grace and service to her, until the open jeers and rude talk of his companions, who alleged that she was no Susannah, that they had certain knowledge of her depravity and licence, compelled Jamie "tae tak' tent wha he wus servin'." Indeed, of himself he never would have found out that she was aught else than the purest of maidens, even although she was little careful for concealment; "but when the lads wad threep she wus a bad ane, and alleige that I holped her for the lik', then I beit tae see tae ma ain karacktar, that it wus nae 'filed through ma ain saftness o' hairt." In fact, Jamie felt compelled, by the men's talk, to change his demeanour to the damsel before the harvest work had set in. Henceforth, being unable to strike the just mean for his communications, seeing that he believed "she wus a bad ane," he was barely civil, greatly dreading contact with her in the slightest matters; so that his

altered behaviour was as much the subject of comment in the bothy as his kindnesses were before. However, Meg was to leave at the term of Martinmas. "She gied notice hersel';" and Jamie made up his mind to abide at the Bught.

His employer, Mr. Masson, tacksman of the Bught, had certainly no desire to lose the man, for Jamie was a model ploughman in his way. He was practically a teetotaller, drinking no strong drinks of any kind; and, what was rarer in a ploughman, he used no tobacco. He was "honest as steel," and might be trusted to return with his horses in the best order, however distant the expedition on which he was despatched. Then, too, he had that great guarantee for good behaviour, a few pounds in the Inverwick savings' bank. Indeed, having been for some years past full ploughman, with his £7 or £7 10s. of half year's wage and his food provided for him, and his lodgings also, he was, as all prudent, unmarried ploughmen ought to be, in a position to save something, notwithstanding his contributions to "grannie." Besides, Jamie had a high religious tendency, very unusual in his class. He never absented himself "frae the kirk his ain end o' the Lord's day." It was his great delight to present himself "in the kirk loft" in his best clothes—"gude blacks"—full twenty minutes before service began, although he had to walk three miles to it. There he sat, distinguished by the huge stand-up collar of indifferently-white cotton, stiffly

starched, extending round neck and ears to his nose, very happy truly. At psalm-singing he roared lustily, to the discomposure certainly of all the worshippers in "the loft." No wonder he was chary of "'filing" a character such as this.

And Jamie set up for respectability in another way, in one, too, which quite as clearly established his good heart and right notions. His grandmother was getting old and frail; but, for all his help of her, she would not cease her itinerant calls for eleemosynary aid, and Jamie deemed himself aggrieved thereby. So the good fellow, after many ineffectual appeals and remonstrances, told her that he would increase his givings to her to five pounds in the year, and that unless she ceased to go about, he would give her nothing, and would see her no more. In vain she argued that he might yet "tak' it intil his heid tae gae for a sodger, an' git kilt;" that "he micht tak' thocht tae mairry, an' nae be able tae help her at a'." Jamie was inexorable, and she had to promise and to keep her word.

A terrible trial awaited Jamie while staying at the Bught, touching all his better nature and aspirations. "It wus shurely o' the deil," he says, for he has a firm faith in that potentate. "He beit be littan tae pit forth his han' an' touch me on the sairest pints; but I kent what tae dae."

"What was that, Jamie?"

"Och, sir! I took me tae ma twa knees. No lik' that bletherin' auld man o' Uz, who yarned lang screeds

till his Maker, tho' they're gran' readin'. I didna dae lik' that; but, kenning better, I made lang prayers, and, praise be till Him, He pulled me through."

The trial came when the March winds were drying the leas, and the ploughmen were all busy with the work of spring. That Meg Bruce brought forth a man-child at the village, and it was bruited abroad that "she was faitherin' it on Jamphlin' Jamie." Where was all his respectability, and his church-going, and psalm-singing now? It was a terrible calamity to be thus unjustly calumniated. No wonder that the poor fellow took to his knees. The jeers and scoffs of the horsemen were indeed hard to bear. Harder still the mild, semi-jocular insinuation that "there is aye some water whaur the stirkie drowns." And the poor fellow could not even pray within doors. Since he had come to the Bught, he had, every night before bedtime, been in the way of going out to the stable, "tae commend himsel' tae the Lord," which, in peace, he could not have done in the bothy. Now the men would torment him thereanent, alleging that "Meg wus dootless the compawnyan o' his deevoshuns!" Well, well, he must now pray all the more earnestly to be delivered from this scandalous wrong. I need not say, that in an unfounded scandal like this, the fear and horror of the innocent man were out of proportion to the evil. It quickly blew itself away.

But the event was not fruitless of results in the life of the poor man. "Aifter an' a', the Lord haed, nae

doot, a purpose in it." And Jamie thought he saw the purpose. Here was he slinking out to his Master, not daring or caring to acknowledge Him openly. That was bad. He should have a family altar to compass. Next, and more, the Lord had said, "It is not good for man to be alone." "Heich! it's His command, and I'll seek for a guid wife o' ma ain, an' nae mair be defenceless afore the fausehood o' ilka randy jaud."

CHAPTER III.

Behold, then, James Howden intent on matrimony. I do not mean to say that there was any singularity in his intent. But there was a specialty in his resolution to wed preceding the finding of any special woman to take him for her husband, of any special woman whom he desired to wed. For, although the world is tolerably well stocked with maidens, choice enough, and all more or less disposed to become wives and mothers, still, if you, O masculine reader, set out of worldly purpose, or, as in this instance, moved by what you esteem the divine will, depend upon it you shall have much difficulty in choosing; and, having chosen, shall have greater difficulty in impetrating the consent of the elected fair one. Nor can I forbear remarking it as strange in such a person as our friend Jamie, that he should conceive it to be for his edification, to go abroad staring at every woman, and

thinking in his heart what manner of wife she might make? Jamie, however, was acting on no poor human mode or counsel. He was simply disposed to obey the behests of God and nature, having found, or fancied that he had found, it was evil for man to be alone.

He went about the matter in a more matter-of-fact way than might have been anticipated. First of all, he gave notice that he was to leave the Bught. It was hard to abide the jests of the ploughmen, who only persisted in them the more that they perceived he was galled, and winced under their wicked wit. Then he told his grandmother that he proposed to take a house in the village, where she should live with him. He would seek farm service close to his home. If he failed to find it, he should turn to day-labour for one season at least. Grannie, however, refused to quit her old garret. She had lived there through many years of sorrow; there she would abide the coming of eternal peace. But he was welcome to come to the garret, if he listed; and this he finally did. He was fortunate in finding an engagement with Mr. Morris, of the Lowes; and at Whitsunday he set to and white-washed the old garret, and set his chest in it. I fear the whitewash was not laid on artistically. It adhered but indifferently to the walls, while it had strong propensity to attach itself to all other objects—as Jamie's Sunday coat, back and elbows of it, too often testified. Being thus settled, he next addressed himself

to the great object to which this settlement was simply preliminary.

What sort of woman would you expect Jamie to affect? He himself made no secret either of his resolution to be no longer the "defenceless airchin'-stock o' wicked limmers," or of the sort of wife he would have. The great and essential characteristic desiderated was this excellent one,—"She maun be God-fearing." I am disposed to think that when he fixed on the quality indispensable, he had in his view at least one woman who possessed it. Indeed, if that was the case, it was only conformable to right reason in the premises, for who would vow to wed a single virtue without some assurance that the blind, the maimed, or the halt did not alone possess it? However that may be, towards the end of June, Mr. James Howden made a formal tender of his heart and person to Mrs. Janet Beaton, housekeeper to Mr. James Sweet, residenter in the village, and was contumeliously rejected. This is Jamie's own account of his luckless wooing—

"Mistress Beaton wus, as I thocht, a vera pious woman, wha served the Lord nicht as weel's day, for she aye frequented prayer meetin's an' the lik', an' frae the first ma hairt wus set upon her, for I considered her ways an' her saul's ways wad mainly be lik' ma ain. Gudeness kens I wus far astray, but nae maitter. Noo, she was weel come-throwgh by me, but oor grieve, tae whom I spake o' ma' thochts, telt me, an' he was a man o' muckle judgment baith o' folk an' caattle, she'd

be a' the mair likely tae tak' a man. In trowth, he uphauded ma feeble han's and waverin' knees i' the business an' garr'd me gang throwgh wi' it, else I dinna think I'd hae dune it o' masel' whan the push cam'. Ye see I didna ken her muckle, nae mair nor till see her at the kirk, but whan I made up ma mind tae tak' a wife, I kind o' ways drew up till her. Sae I spake till her on the road frae the kirk ane Sunday. She wus gaein' along brawly in her black gown, for she wus aye weel buskit, and says I, 'Wus na yon a godly discoorse, mam?' Jist tae brak' the ice I said it, an' I mind her answer quite weel. Says she, 'Young man, I think ye're i' the way o' seekin'. Tak' comfort. Them that seek'll find.' Noo, that sayin' dumfoondered me clean, for I thocht she haed fun' oot' an' read the secret thochts o' ma hairt, sae that I haedna ane word o' answer for her.

"Weel, whan I made up ma mind that it was tae be her I wus for, an' whan I wus settled at the Lowes, aifter the term, coming hame at aucht o'clock, I gaed tae the meetin's, tae, an' I lat her ken hoo [illegible] man I wus, an' I kent she saw it, for she wad aye be [illegible]-lookin' at me at the singin'. I thocht she took notice o' me by ordinair. Sae whan I haed been gaein' regular till the vestry for sax week or sae, I felt mysel' tae spake till her o' the pint that consarned me maistly, an' mairover, the grieve thocht it wad be richt tae [illegible] while the iron wus het. Weel, I did it. After the meetin', whan she wus at her maister's back door, I

stepped up till her, an' says I, 'I' the name o' the Lord, may I hae speech wi' ye, mistress?' Says she, 'What aboot? Step in, young man.' And she turnit the key i' the dure an' showed me intil her kitchen; an' ma certies, it wus a braw, clean plaice, a' sweept an' garnished, an' I noticed that e'en the handles o' the water pails, under the dresser, was shinin', lik' oor siller-mounted harness. I thocht, if it plaised the Lord, hoo weel she wad keep a hoose o' her ain, whan she did you for hire. Sae still thinkin', I sat doun be the fire, and says she, 'What is it?' Noo, ye ken, it ne'er wad dae tae say, coorse an' plain, tae her, 'Wull ye be ma wife?' Sae I gaed roon' the bush a bit. Says I solemnly, 'Mistress Beaton, we're commandit tae mairry an' nae till burn.' Wi' that says she tae me, vera fierce and wild, 'Wha daur say that am burnin'?' Says I, quite doucely, 'Hoot, wumman! It's i' the word! Whasae rinneth may read. There's but twa states o' us i' the buik, the mairried an' the burnin'. Noo, ye 'rd nae wedded.' Wi' that she flung up i' the awfu'st rage, an' caaed me ilka name but a sawnt, an' ordered me forth that instant, while I cudna see whaur I wus wrang, for ma words were a' truth an' soberness. Sae I tried to pit it calmly afore her. Says I, 'Beg yer pardon, ye're *nae* mairried, an' it *is* written "It is better"'—but I hardly gat time tae finish the words, whan 'Be off, yo impident fella,' she howled, an' while I wus sittin innocent on the chayre, feelin' ma haid for composure, she up wi' a bucket o' water

an' let drave at me, an' soused me neck an' crap, an' then truly I fleed awa', sair droukit ye may believe. Weel, weel, for a', it may be wus gude I missed her, for lang aifter I heerd bad an' ugly haivers o' hersel' an' her maister, Sweet; an' nae doot it's a' for the best."

After this ludicrous termination of his first love-dream, Jamie went many days mazed and wondering. So bewildered was he, so stunned by the action of the "God-fearing" woman, that it was some days before he could betake himself to his devotions, in which his old grandmother was now the interested participant, many days before even his daily labour became to him what it used to be. The grieve, in vain, sought to explain the rude result by the fact of some idiosyncrasy of Mrs. Beaton, alleging that some women went mad at the bare thought of matrimony. Jamie could not console himself with any such belief. Who next was he to adventure on? The grieve was curious to know that, but Jamie, "wi' that flea i' his lug," could listen to no suggestion for his connubial happiness. "There's mony lasses wad hae ye, man, Jamie, real fair-faured queans, if ye jist said the word tae them. For instance, there's Bell Fraser." But at mention of Bell Fraser, Jamie would get up and stalk off with as much dignity as his shambling legs allowed him to assume.

Bell Fraser was a village girl, or rather woman, for she was twenty-nine years of age. As rough a woman she was as any field squad in the Strath or county could

exhibit, but withal a hard-working, willing woman. She was comely, too, after the manner of comeliness in her class, which implies large bones and well-developed muscles, suitable for the labour which won her bread. But, chiefly, Bell was distinguished for her ready speech, "her jaw," as her comrades termed it, and for her pronounced opinions on the subject of matrimony, in favour of it, I mean. It "wus weel kent what kind o' hussey she wus. She'll hae a man (husband) wi' fair means or foul, or she'll hang hersel' wi' a man's gairtars if better canna be made o' it." Indeed, her deportment towards the opposite sex was not regulated, to any degree worth mentioning, by womanly delicacy. Jamie's view of the scriptural text, as quoted so unhappily to Mrs. Beaton, might have entire applicability to her. I am sorry to have to say that she feared not God while thus she regarded man.

Now, this Bell Fraser having been for years a field worker at the Lowes, had early and rather warmly assailed my friend Mr. James Howden on his advent there. To this I doubt not that Jamie's own garrulity contributed, for before he had been twenty-four hours on the farm, he had himself made wholly known the proud contents of his savings' bank book, and a little of the secret desires and objects of his life. Therefore Bell set upon him as quite "a suitable chiel tae mak' her a man," and at the steading, in her rough way, she got her arms round his neck, to the sad defilement of his starched shirt collar, for she was not cleanly, and

while he struggled to get away, she dragged him along and shouted to the men and maidens to witness her happiness and her triumph. Verily a mad wench she was, who thus became to the soul of Jamie a sore distress and persecution. "Oot o' the fryin' pan intae the fire," said he, sorrowfully. "I 'scapit frae the Bught frae evil tongues. Noo, am compassed aboot wi' bulls o' Bashan, monsters o' a' iniquity, wha shurely will devoor me, 'less the Lord send deliverance."

Bell lived in the village main street, a few doors off from Jamie's garret, so that she menaced his repute for godliness and his fair fame generally, not at the farmstead only, but on the highway, yea, even in the village street. Thus was he fearfully tormented. But it was only for a season, for when Bell saw that she made no impression on him favourable to her own ends, she ceased to bother him, although still from time to time she showed readiness "tae fa' tae 't again."

Such was not at all the sort of woman that Jamie would select—far from it. But it took some time after his first most complete discomfiture before he could bring his thoughts to any serious consideration of the subject. I believe that it was his grandmother who first shed light on the darkness and difficulty that had settled down on his matrimonial mind. At least so I gather from his confused talk. "Says grannie tae me, 'Ma days canna be lang noo,' (they war shortar, puir boddy, than she thocht), 'an' I'd lik' tae see ye settled, laddie, afore the call comes. Jest tak' ye ony bonny

queanie oot o' a clean nest, ony ane ye lik', yersel', an' I'll be weel pleasit.' She wus a kind soul wus grannie, rest her."

So Jamie became possessed with the conception "o' a bonny, bonny bit lassay oot o' a clean nest—jist o' dacent paurentage, ye ken." That would satisfy his longing soul. And up and down the village he went, and round about, "glowering" for the commodity he wanted, and it was not long before that wag, the grieve, knew his thoughts and intents of heart. "Noo, Jamie, winna that ane dae ye? I guess she'd shoot ye fine," the grieve would shout, each chit of a lassie they chanced to pass as they drove their carts along. My belief is that the pursuit of matrimony in such modes must have been injurious to the poor fellow's frame of mind and growth in grace.

At last they settled it "atween himsel' an' the grieve," that bonny Annie Dallas, at Lowestoft, a pendicle of the estate and barony of the Lowes, was the girl whose love would assure him happiness. And having settled it, the grieve left Jamie to follow up his suit in his own way, secure of this, I suppose, that, whichever way he chose to follow it up, he would make a mess of it. Annie was the daughter of a farmer who farmed the Toft, a little holding of some sixty acres, a pretty, little, sun-browned maid, and as good every whit as bonny, her father's solace and comfort, his grieve, his dairy-woman, his all. Such a girl, perforce of her beauty and her goodness, had many followers, who

strove hard to win her smiles and her love. It was no uncommon sight to see half a dozen ploughs going on the Toft in a late season, each sturdy young fellow who guided one moved to aid the farmer for the sake of "bonnie Nanny." I am sure you will concur in this with me—the selection was excellent, however desperate the hope.

Yet Jamie's first approach, although indirect, was not inartistic. I suspect it was suggested by the grieve. It was the means of introducing him to the household. You know it never would have done to march up to the Toft, in such mode as Jamie could march, and proclaim that he came for "Annie" Was it not written, "Be ye wise as serpents?" In his attendance at the vestry prayer-meetings, Jamie had been constituted a collector "for the haythin," and a tin box, sealed up, having a slit to receive "the collection," had been entrusted to him. Who or what was "the haythin" Jamie knew not. It might be "the puir deil" for aught he knew, for the term to him signified only badness in general. What "the haythin" was or were to do with the box and the money, when he or they got it, nowise concerned his soul. But, the box being now gravid with Jamie's own weekly pence, was turned to account as a reason for calling at the Toft, Mr. Dallas being a church member, and like most men of his class and years, putting much value on due observation of ordinances.

To the Toft then Jamie hied on a Saturday evening

in golden August, when the soft south wind was fanning the fiery heat of the red sun, which was making the grain glow yellow in its glare. He found the old farmer sauntering by the beech hedge which fenced his break of barley, speculating on the earliest date at which he should summon his friends and hired people to cut it down. Jamie saluted him gravely, congratulating him on the security of the promise "There shall aye be seed-time an' hairst." Then he bluntly to his errand; "He was colleckin' for the haythin." "What haythin?" "Oo, ay; the minister's haythin;" which with the production of the box, was accepted as complete and satisfactory explanation. The farmer would contribute, and bade Jamie step to the house with him. At the house there were Annie and two young farmer lads, and supper was spread forth awaiting the father's return, for in such houses, where, with inmates such as the pretty girl, visitors might be expected, the Saturday supper was the gala-feast of the week. James Howden, with frank hospitality, was invited to sit down and share it, and the farmer gave him sixpence, the sweet daughter a silver groat, dropping the coins into that box for the "haythin."

The head of the house was earnest in entreating a blessing on the meal, of which he and his daughter and the three strangers then partook; and thereafter, while Annie and the young farmers were gone from the room, the farmer and James Howden conversed pleasantly of crops and feeding stuffs, and of the potato

disease, which that year had shown itself badly in the Strath. Throughout the conversation, James bore himself not only with fair good sense, but with pious observation also, specially marked in reference to the potato blight, which "was jist ae judgment on a stiff-neckit an' rebellious generation, an' was tae be steyed only by hoomiliawshun an' prayar." And he dilated on the exceeding efficacy of prayer in all things. In fact the old man thought his discourse "highly improving."

Suddenly Miss Dallas returned with her young friends, and the books were brought and the farmer read a chapter. They sang no psalm, which was certainly a defect in their simple devotions. There was at least one of the little band of worshippers who would have delighted to "bawl in Bangor." Yet for him there was consolation, for, the chapter ended, Mr. Dallas asked James "tae engage," and the request was complied with. Habituated to pray, indeed having "a gift" therein, he prayed fervently and feelingly, from his simple heart. But then he had no dread of "vain repetitions" and was unconscionably prolix, keeping them on their knees for the longer part of an hour. To have an audience was a rare thing for him, and such an audience, comprising the object of his ambitious affection, was surely enough to spur a man to the utmost and highest exercise of his gifts. "Heich, friend," said Dallas, "ye didna spair yersel'." But bonny Annie was evidently displeased, for she

whipt out of the room without the slightest acknowledgment of James's excellence. However, the exercise had greatly gratified James himself, and to Mr. Dallas he protested that he "haed ne'er afore feelt sic' sweetness in it," spoke so much of his delight that the old man said, "Weel, wha kens but ye may jine wi' us in a coming time?" Instantly said Jamie, "I'll come neist Saturday;" which was more than Mr. Dallas intended.

Jamie went home carrying his box for "the haythin" in his hand as a most precious thing. He held it at arm's length before him, in the moonlight, as he trudged along. His soul was full of pleasant thoughts, very much in admiration of himself, wholly in admiration of Annie Dallas. "Isn't she a bo-onny queanie?" he asked himself. "Winna grannie be plaisit if I get the lik' o' her?" When, lo! on the road stood Bell Fraser. "Stan', Jamie!" said she, "whaur awa' hae ye been hawkin'? Whaur till are ye jamphlin' noo?" He was filled with horror of the rough woman, who, seeing he was not to obey her behest to stand, sprang upon him and his box to seize him by the collar. "Haud awa', woman!" he shouted in horror, and springing aside he evaded her and fled homewards. She pursued him for a few paces only, although she rudely shouted her contempt after him as he fled.

Jamie was not devoid of sentiment. No sooner had he got home and poured out all his happy, hopeful

feelings into the old grandmother's ear, than he set to work to extract the fourpenny piece of silver from the mission-box. To this end he inserted a knife-blade at the slit, by which he hoped to wile or guide the coin to and through the orifice. It was in vain. The little bit was so refractory that he never once caught sight even of its rim, in the mass of coppers. "Gae till yer bed, Jamie laddie. Whate'er are ye workin' lik' a gouk on the boxie for?" grumbled grannie from her blankets, under which she could not sleep for the rattling of the coppers in the box. Jamie explained that he wanted "tae git oot the wee groat, tae pit a hole intil't for a keepsake till himsel'." Then she called him "a'fule gouk," but still he persevered. He only succeeded in getting at the prize by cutting up the tin box with his knife. He was in a desperate frame when he did it, dreading that "he might be ta'en up for robbery o' the haythin," although he had honestly introduced four copper coins of his own to make up for the little one he desired to extract.

He went about next week in an excited way, and I fear that his loquacity concerning himself and his objects helped to frustrate his hopes. It must have been that those two young friends of Miss Dallas heard of his haiverings and his intent to repeat his visit on the following Saturday, for they were waiting for him. With wily speech they induced him to go to the cheese bench behind the barn, the most remote part of the steading, at night wholly unfrequented. There one of

them held him in deceitful talk about doctrines, in close proximity to the cheese vat, until the other had opportunity of drawing the ends of Jamie's garments underneath the press cog, on which he quickly screwed down the hard granite block, and then removing the handle of the screw, came innocently to share in listening to Jamie. Suddenly they bade him "good nicht." He was saying softly, "Losh, what's this?" as the scamps disappeared.

He found himself fixed securely in the press; and, in the absence of the handle, and as the apparatus was at his back, he could not free himself. He saw that the lads had tricked him; and it was somewhat humiliating, "certainly vera hummlin'," for a man of his gifts and graces, to be fooled by "twa sic louns." His course was to sit quietly till the scamps came to release him. He sat patiently, therefore, that he might not suffer disparagement in the eyes of the nymph of the Toft. But when he had sat under the moon for an hour alone, that orb went hid in a pile of black cloud, and a faint, hot breeze puffed over the corn fields, and, by-and-by, there was a fitful sheen, followed by a peal of distant thunder. Now, Jamie had a great dread of thunder, and it was time to bestir himself. Slowly it dawned on him that he might free himself by simply putting off his coat; and this he did, but to find that the ample seat of his breeches had been cunningly involved in the bite of the vat. All his instincts forbade him "tae pairt wi' his breeks,"

even if it had been convenient to do so, which, from his position on the bench, it was not. So he endued himself with his coat again, and sat still.

Down came the pelting thunder-rain on Jamie's "Sawbath claes." In dire dismay, he lifted up his voice and roared at intervals, for long unheard and unheeded. But at last he was heard, and then followed the fierce barking of many dogs, and the brutes all rushed as if to worry the vociferous intruder. Then the protracted trial and terror culminated. Bound to his seat, drenched to the skin, amid the darkness made appalling by an occasional flash and distant roar of heaven's artillery, Jamie was absolutely upset by the onset of the curs. "Am bewitched, am bewitched! Am gi'en ower tae the auld ane!" he roared, in mental prostration. At length one of the farm lassies, who just a week before had suffered from Jamie's exercises, called off the dogs and relieved him, but not before one wicked terrier had fixed its teeth in Jamie's leg. The bite was not much to speak of, but for a month it left Jamie in lively fear that "he wus gaen mad," or "boun' tae gae mad." Thus ended his courting at the Toft.

November found him single and defenceless still, beginning, through the ignominy of his disappointments, to guess that love or the happiness of matrimony did not come for mere whistling; at least, that he was not the man to whistle it to his hand. And still the desire to wed grew upon him. He became

low of spirits, stooped more of shoulders, more jamphlin' and awkward of gait. But the whole conditions of his life were suddenly changed. His old grandmother, having gone forth to wander, from the which all his remonstrances could not deter her wholly, was found by him one wet night drenched with rain, as she had often been, and also shivering and sick. She lay in bed next day, Jamie thinking not much of her ailing. On the second day she was dead. But while the body lay still unburied, Jamie found himself ill, as he had never found himself before, and lay down trembling, unable to pay the last duties to her dust. Speedily it became known that he had "the fevvar," and the neighbours forsook him and fled.

Not one could Dr. Blake get for love or money to undertake to nurse this lonely and despised lad. Then it was that Bell Fraser, with all a woman's humanity, and all the heroism that humanity evokes, with not one prompting, I can assure you, save that humanity, stood in the breach between death and Jamie, nursed him through his protracted illness, even while she knew that he disliked her presence. While thus ministering to him, she was refused admittance to her own home, and had to lodge in the fever-burdened room, shunned by all. No wonder it was, that by the time when Jamie, weak and emaciated, was able to sit up once more, poor Bell lay down, fever-stricken, on the bed he had vacated. Now it was his turn to nurse and tend her; and in that nursing, Jamie was drawn very

closely and sympathetically towards her, and a new chord was found in his nature which had vibrated never before. Its vibration gave him true human delight. Bell became Mrs. Howden at Whitsunday following when Jamie came to occupy his cottage in the lane.

His husbandhood, his fatherhood, and, after his lights, God's service, are more to Jamie than power or wealth or honour of men. Ask him how he fares. He will answer you that he is well, and lives in comfort. He has no high standard to consult. "There's a gey wheen o' us, God bless us a'; but, ye see, the bairns gaither moss for the pig's bed, an' we mak' a hantle o' dung, an' aye set a great length o' taties, an' that brings us ane meal a day shure." So in the summer evening, his day of farm work over, his work and duties manfully performed, he disports him with his little ones, and has much humble happiness in his life. I dare say his "better half," Mrs. Bell, dominates over him, but he does not feel it greatly. He sometimes is concerned for her. "She's o' the warld, warldly; nae lik' me, seekin' grace frae on high. May the Lord send it till her in a gude time." And Amen, say I.

WIDOW MACRAW

CHAPTER I.

"SHE'S deid, she's deid!"

Three or four women all said it, and it was too true. The widow had her apron to her eyes, and, there was no mistake about it, her grief was unfeigned. She was a spare little woman, her thin figure clothed in a home-spun gown, rough but clean. Her cap was neat and white, looking whiter for the broad black ribband that bound it round her head. "Am sair veesited and straited, neebors," she said. "God only kens what waey we're to win through noo!"

"Ay, ay, ay!" said the chorus of neighbours. "It's vera hard, but it's His will, poor craitar!"

The widow sat down on the haunch of her dead cow, and wept many tears, quiet and hot.

"We canna help her na mair, friends," the women said one to the other, "we may be steppin';" and they went out of the byre and left her beside her dead beast, but not alone. There stood at the head of the cow-stall a young girl, quite a slip of a girl, thin,

slender, and tall, a timid-looking lassie, who looked much less than the seventeen years that was her age. She also was piteously, although tearlessly, contemplating the defunct crummie. Perhaps she did not comprehend its death and the consequences of it in their entirety. "Dinna greet, mither," after a time she said to the weeping widow. "Dinna be greetin', mither." Her sympathetic voice was near "the greetin'," too.

"I canna help it, lassie. It wus maist oor a', an' it's taen frae us! Whaur can we look for breid, whan the beist's gane?" said the widow.

It was not unreasonable that the widow should mourn and feel desolated by the loss of her cow, for her mind took in the full compass of her misfortune, realised the whole evil that must follow upon it. That you may see her position somewhat as she felt it, I will briefly tell you her story.

Her husband, John Macrae; for Macrae was the real name, converted into "Macraw" through local supposition of euphony, was a tall, bony man, who came into the district long years ago, from Ross-shire. After he had spent some years as a farm servant, he married this poor little woman; and, thereafter, losing regular employ, he built for himself, with permission of one of the small farmers, a bothy on the Langrig Braes, and toiled early and hard at all sorts of country work to win bread for his wife and the three little bairns that came to them. In his eager labour, striving

to make a shilling, or, perhaps, but hardly, two, extra per week in "piece-work" in a quarry, he overtasked and overstrained himself; and offended Nature, in her calm and unrelenting way, punished the transgression, making no account of the loving motive of the too assiduous toiler. The tall, spare Highlander laid down his ill-nourished and over-taxed body on a sick bed, "put up blood," and pined and died, leaving the poor ones he loved so well to struggle as they might, leaving them also, and only, that poor cow. That was six years ago.

Perhaps the fact that he was leaving them the cow mitigated for him the bitterness of his fate. Certainly it largely modified for them their great calamity. It was no fabulous animal, no miraculous mother of golden calves, but a commonplace "coo," valued highly, when poor John bought it, at the eight guineas, so hardly won and put together, which it cost him. Still it is wonderful how much of the purchasing power of meal and necessaries may flow from a cow. The bairns had only a stinted allowance of the precious milk; the widow rarely tasted it, excusing herself on the shallow pretext that "it didna agree wi' her." With jealous care the cream was gathered and consigned to the little churn, the skimmed milk, saving "the bairns' pairt," all to the cheese-vat.

And the widow was so tidy, clean, and nice in her ways that she coaxed more butter and cheese from her cow than came from any other beast on the braes.

Her butter and cheese were of such flavour and manufacture, too, that when she took her little stock to market at Hallowmas, it was eagerly sought for, and obtained the top price of the day. In this, and in his little wife, the achiever of it, the poor Highlandman used to glory over his moderate dram before he left the fair.

But cows must be fed that they may live and give milk, and from this law there was no exemption of the widow's. For weeks, too, it gave no milk, and yet needed feeding. Its licence to stray and pasture on "the hill ground," that is, on the common, cost £2 10*s.* a year. While the husband's willing arm had kept want far from his little household, his cow used to rejoice with other cows in the fields of second year's grass, rich with the speckled daisy and the yellow cowslip; yes, and at times in sweeter fields of odorous aftermath. But it shared the privation which death brought to the family, shared it, of course, in much the same spirit—dumb submissiveness. Its days "in clover" were ended and gone. The widow could not purchase for it right of access to the daisied pasture field. Its acquaintance with straw, that great necessary of bestial, also well nigh ceased, for the bracken, and "the rashes" green, and the hill-moss, carefully gathered and borne home by the widow and her daughter, were its bedding. It must pick up its living on the hill side. A stinted supply of turnips, produced from the byre-manure, was

its main food in winter, supplemented sparingly with boiled chaff, liberally in latter winter and spring with bruised whins. It was a hard and endless task to gather and fetch for it; but its owners were kindly, even affectionately minded towards the beast. Yet withal, I dare say, it had times of ruminating with little solid matter therefor, while ever it was carefully milked while it yielded a drop. Well, there it was now, its days of milking and misery completed; and with it the widow's sole source of meal and money was dried up. Since John "was called," no such grief as this had come to her. Even then she did not feel so helpless, so hopeless, as now beside the dead cow. Perhaps the six years of hard toil and stint had worn and ground down her spirit, so that little sorrow sufficed to crush her.

The April sun was shining cheerily when these two poor mourners, the thin little widow and her thinner daughter, came out of the dark byre into the daylight. The shadows of the byre, I fear, were upon them so that they could not see that goodness was abroad on the earth. Present disaster, instant grief, blind the eyes of all of us for a time, for a time seal up all those springs within us that freshen life with hope. In the sunshine the widow only suffered fresh pangs, for her eye fell on the store of ferns and moss, "the bedding" so carefully garnered for the beast. "What's it a' noo?" she thought in pain. "Och, och!" was all that escaped her lips, as, with

her child, she went into the bothy that was their home.

The youngest boy had gone away ten days before "tae the simmer herding." His elder brother had been "oot i' the fraim" for two years past, so these poor women were alone in their trouble. No doubt this was well. If the boys had had to be fed the evil would have been much greater. Indeed, if the widow could have seen it, there were not wholly wanting streaks of light in her dark affliction. "The callants were earning their ain bit breid and their brose." And would it have been well for that lanky lassie to be slave of the cow for much longer?

By eventide it was arranged that "Jamie Knockans wad fley the beist the morn." The morrow came, and Mary got sick when she saw the man thrust his knife into her dead friend. She was sent away. The hardier widow stood by and helped the man. Hide and horns were worth a pound, a large sum and of increased importance now that the cow was dead.

Besides the pound thus sorrowfully obtained, the widow's treasury contained a few shillings only. Nay, therein I say not quite aright, for, with the shillings, in "the shottle" of the big chest, there lay two pound notes, as all the children knew. But they were sacred. Against the day of her burial the widow kept them, and had kept them for full five years. The notes were not for this world's currency while she was of it.

Two or three days of saddened idleness, there being now no cow to attend, brought thought and resolution. What a silly proverb that is, "No cow, no care." Blackest care broods in the empty stall. But this was what they set their minds to—they must part. The young girl must seek service, the widow quit the spot where now she could find nought but miserable memories. She could not, would not, stay alone in the old home, where, in happier days, her husband rose up and went forth, came in and lay down; where her little brood, now scattered, had nestled and grown up, and peace and humble plenty had been with them all. No, she "cudna bide there by hersel' alane." She would take a room at the Kirktown. She would spin and do odd jobs, and God would feed her while He was pleased to leave her in the land.

They made up their minds, but few words passed between them. Indeed, after the first burst of grief for the cow, they showed little outward sign of their inward misery. Hope will find utterance and words; habitual suffering is usually voiceless.

"Ye maun gang oot, Mary, be the term," said the widow, with a sigh.

"Ay, mither, I maun gang, am thinkin'," completed the agreement that she should go, and they spoke not of it again.

But, by and by, the feeing-market came round with the last week of April. Thither the old woman and the young one must go, that the latter might find an employer, that the mother might see to her daughter's

feeing, and might find a new home for herself. When they closed the door of the vacant house and set out on their errand, the lassie was thinly although cleanly clad; the mother had on her old plaid shawl, carefully preserved from her better days. Heavy-hearted they were, doubtless, but still willing to live, very willing to toil that they might eat and live.

They got into the village before the fair was fairly constituted; so they went along the back street, asking for a room to be let—"ony place," "ony kin' o' shelter whaur a lone body micht bide;" but not a crib could they hear of. The widow's face fell, and her heart too, for although she had been silent, her heart was full of her scheme, and now it seemed doomed to go wrong.

Then they stood in the great throng in the market-place, the Square, and great strange men came staring carelessly into their faces, and passed them by. It was two o' clock by and by, and no man had asked them "What dost thou here?" New fear was besetting the widow. The young lassie was feeling the keen north wind, for the sky had become overcast. At length there came along a man who recognised the widow and stood to speak to her. He was a tall, brawny, rough man, clad in homespun, with a plaid round his shoulders and a battered grey hat with a mourning band. He stood to speak to the widow, and forthwith set his stick under his oxter, pulled out his snuff-box, and began to take snuff lavishly. Mrs.

Macrae quickly told her errand at the fair. "Did he need a lass like her Mary?"

The farmer took a leisurely and careful survey of the girl, calmly as if he were looking at a cattle-beast. "Na, she's gey licht an' wakelik' for wark," he said slowly. "Ye'll no fin' mony tae speir for her, I'm feart. Widow, what wad ye say tae fee yersel'? Ye'd make a faimous dey." In fact, he wanted a dairy-woman and was willing to hire the widow, but he would have nought to say to her slight-limbed daughter.

"But ye see we maunna, canna pairt if she's no fee-ed."

"Weel, weel, there's ma offer till ye. £3 10*s.*, forbye cost as ordinair. I'll gie ye an hoor tae rejec' it. Ye'll fin' me then by Polson's door." And he left them in the crowd.

In the crowd, surging and swaying about, laughing, shouting, my-dearing, cursing, for the cold of the afternoon was bringing about no small demand for whisky, and the voice of the multitude was waxing hoarse. Up came a young farmer and laid his hand on the shoulder of Mary Macrae. "Are you fee-ed?" he asked with a leer. "Let's see your teeth."

"Come along, Tom, don't you see she's no' speaned, man!" said a comrade. "That old one would bite. Come along." Staggering they passed away. Poor Mary! she had never thought much of herself, but her weakness and unworthiness now so confronted her

that the tears were in her eyes. Was she indeed only fit to attend her mother's cow, fit to toil and slave for it alone? Now that there was no cow, must she helplessly weight down her mother?

Up came Kate Calder from the braes. "Are ye no hired yet, Maraie?" asked she. Mary could not reply with words. Her face gave her answer, and Kate understood it. "Weel, then," said Kate, "come this way, here's a fairmer's wife wantin' a bairnsmaid."

"Wha's she?" asked the anxious mother.

Kate "kent naething o' her," "had jist heerd her speirin' for a lassie tae nurse and wark aboot." But the woman was found, a large, hard-visaged woman, at sight of whom the widow's heart turned faint. She did want a lassie to mind the bairns, to mind her cow, to clean the house, in fact to work indoors or out as need might be. For all this catalogue of services she would give no more wages than thirty shillings by the half year. Yet must the lassie find a home, and Mary Macrae was engaged to serve this Mrs. Davidson, who was the wife of a small tenant in the Newlands of Howe.

Now it was time for the widow to see Mr. Fraser, the old farmer at Knockdry, and, with her daughter at her side, she pressed her way towards Polson's inn. "Hooray, hooray!" whooped a number of noisy lads, rushing from the inn door in half-tipsy uproar. "Hooray, hooray!" shouted one little fellow of them as he came against the widow and almost overthrew her. "Ah

me, ah me!" groaned the woman audibly, for it was her elder boy, Sandy, who thus had run against her, and hurt her. There he was now, struggling to escape from Mary, who had seized him by the arm and by the coat. "Stan', ye scaimp, Sandy, an' speak t' yer mither," but with an oath the boy broke from her and fled. "Wae's me!" said the widow. The women looked at each other, and there was a tear in the mother's eye; but they spoke not, and went on to the Inn.

They found Mr. Fraser, and the widow hired herself to serve him, and thus their lives were to be severed. Meantime, they must trudge home, tired and hungry and sad, and in drenching sleet, for their separation was not to be till the term. For minds and bodies roughened by usage, and to the manner accustomed, the feeing-market may be no ordeal. To these two poor women the day and its events were a real trial; to the younger more especially, who never, till then, had faced the world, crushing down the little elasticity of spirit, that long privation had left her, and stamping her soul with abasement and self-depreciation. The two shillings got as arles the widow kept and carried home. They would help at the pinch to come at the term.

Half rations make weary, heavy-winged hours. Empty stomachs and idleness waste both body and soul. You know that the widow had some shillings, yet would she mete and measure the dole of meal,

which was all the meal she had, and count out her few potatoes so as to stretch them, if possible, to the term-day. The daughter must have shoes and some little things, and these were not to be reconciled with plenteous feeding. But the term-day came at last, almost longed for it came, although it was to extinguish their hearth-fire and give their home to a stranger.

The term-day came and all their poor bits of deal furniture, and the spinning-wheel, having been duly washed and scrubbed with powdered freestone, were stuck up high amid the rafters of the outhouse of a neighbouring crofter, who kindly undertook to store them there. The big chest, filled with the much-prized blankets,—"wha kens wha may need them yet?"—was deposited, with the lesser meal chest above it, in a corner of the outhouse, and covered over with sundry broken hurdles and the like to avert the eye of the covetous. By eight o'clock in the morning, they had eaten their last drop of water brose in their home, all their earthly goods having been removed, save the deal bed-frames, sold to the incoming tenant at the modest price of five shillings. Then they "slocked" the fire, gazed wistfully round the bare and blank walls, and went on their ways.

What is the use of being sad over such a matter? You know that hundreds in our land on every term-day have memories as sorrowful, lives as crushed as these two, hearts with as little hope as there is fire

in their extinguished ingles. Yet the sun shines blythely on the term-day, and the May wind whistles "hope" to souls that hear it, and the laverock and all the birds sing forth the love and good that are in life.

They took their way together to the village. They wandered about visiting all the shops where such things as they wanted were for sale, priced them all, higgling and bargaining hardly, and going out and pondering the comparative prices and values of the goods. Thereafter they made their little purchases, and, when it was four o'clock, in a quiet corner of the Square, they ate each a pennyworth of wheaten bread, an unwonted luxury. Then they looked at each other, for their hour to part had come. They joined their hands, and the widow gazed into the face of her child. "God bless ye, ma bairn, and keep ye, till we meet in peace."

"Mither!" was all the daughter's answer, for the tears were in her eyes, and her voice failed her. A minute they stood thus looking. Their hands parted, and each went her way, stopping and looking back oft-times, till the curves of street and road hid them from each other.

They gave each other no kiss when thus they parted. Indeed, the peasant parent rarely kisses his grown-up offspring. Why it should be thus I know not. Perhaps the hard things of their lives gradually harden their ways so that they will not have softness to shew

itself in their manners. Hearts full of love or pity or sorrow for son or daughter may prompt the parents to words and acts full of intensest feeling; the unbidden tear may fill the parental eye, but the toil-strained arms are not stretched for embraces, kissing lips do not make exhibition of affection.

It is a weary, weary world, and mostly either the ways through it are dusty and dry, or the miry clay sticks fast to slipping feet. And the weary way so occupies most of us that we cannot see the landscape, rich in beauty, that stretches all around. At least, Mary Macrae saw none of it, could see no merit in the scene that lay before her, on surmounting the topmost ridge on the south side of our valley. The undulating land stretched far to the south and west, towards the evening sun. Mile after mile spread the green and brown heath, with stretches of verdant pasture interspersed through it, with here and there blackened reaches, the calcined passages of recent muir-burn. Here and there also in the wide expanse stood a new-looking cottage, with its twenty or forty acres of new land attached to it, new land recently rescued by dint of arm and pickaxe and fire from the ancient heath, and on which the new brairding grain was cropping out in lustrous green. Then there was the pine wood in the distance with the shooting-lodge on its outskirts, and afar off were the burnished crests of hills. She saw it, but she felt it not, for her heart was full of other things, and her little bundle was growing heavy

on her arm as she wearily trudged in the glorious sunshine, feeling little else than the weariness of life.

It is a weary, weary world. It is good that there are corners of it where there is plenty of porridge. To one such corner Mary Macrae had come that night, for whatever might be the peculiarities of the large woman who claimed her services, she heaped the lassie's platter on her coming and bade her eat abundantly. "Ye maun be hungry, lass. Sit doun an' tak' awa," she said; and the young girl was an hungered and fain to eat, but she could barely taste of the food. And wherefore, pray? The platter was heaped and the invitation was rudely kind. But, oh me! she who had never eaten save in the old home, off the old board, from the hand of a parent, could you expect her, even in her hunger, "tae fa' tae" and eat in the house of the stranger? She could not eat with the great round eyes of three or four little folk staring at her, with three great men at the fire-side watching her, she knew, over their tobacco pipes. She sickened even amid the fumes of the porridge, which at the first were so fragrant to her appetized. A mouthful sufficed to fill her. She could have burst into tears and been the better for it, as she sat looking at the porridge, for her heart was sore and her mind perturbed, there at the great deal table sitting alone.

"Is aught wrang with the parritch?" asked the mistress dourly. "I ne'er see a lass warth muckle for wark that's feckless wi' her horn-spune."

"But they'll ait wha winna wark," said her husband gruffly from the fireside.

They meant not unkindly. It would have all been right if she had bluntly answered them that she had come to work and would do it, although to-night she could not eat. I do not think she took it for chiding, but she could find no words or voice for reply.

"Let her alane. She'll be forfouchten the nicht. A day or twa 'll bring her round," said a man, speaking in a distinct way as if he had right to speak there. Mary timidly glanced at the speaker. He was sitting smoking, with a gun across his knees, and a shot-bag over his shoulder. He was what he looked, a gamekeeper, and was brother of Mrs. Davidson. He had helped her husband to take the piece of land, to reclaim it and to stock it.

"If ye canna take it leave it, lass," the mistress said. "I'll show ye the byre afore ye gang tae bed. Com' this way." And the girl followed her.

Hugh Davidson, the head of this small household, was a hard-working man, who had about him not a little of rude comfort. There stöod in his byre two good milch cows; and the girl's heart warmed at the sight of them, although they were woefully dirty. There was plenty of straw, too, although the season was so far advanced. It would be her duty each morning, her mistress told her, to turn them into the "pasture field ayont the whin fence" at five o' clock. The mistress herself would milk them thereafter, while

the girl "redd" up the house and clothed the bairns and made the porridge.

They returned to the dwelling-house and found Mr. Davidson and the gamekeeper at the door. The latter had a spy-glass at his eye, and was saying he must be going. When the women came up, he closed his glass and fixed a keen eye on the lassie, and smiled to her very kindly. He alone smiled to her, and the smile went to her heart and did her good, she thought.

With calmer mind Widow Macrae went through the well-appointed byres and steading at Knockdry, which had been partly built and much improved only the year before. There were many cows and many young beasts, and there was no mistress, and scanty help in much work. Therefore it was apparent that her labour and responsibility would be great. And even on this, the first night of her servitude, she found that old Fraser, who kept prying about, had in him something to justify the fame of being "a cankered carle," which had reached her since she fee-ed.

What a weird strange feeling Mary had that night as she undressed to lie down. She was to sleep with two of the children in "the kitchen bed," for the kitchen was not only kitchen, but family room and the bairns' sleeping room as well. As she sat on the edge of the bed, she saw Davidson, her master, rake up the peat ashes on the hearth, deposit in them a large peat, heap it over with the ashes, and lay a flat stone upon the mass. He was "resting" the fire for

the night, that there might be "a kindlin'" for the morrow. All her life long the girl had seen it done nightly by father or mother, or she had done it herself. But to-night she watched it as if it were a proceeding utterly new and strange to her, while she listened also to the ticking of "the wag-at-the wa'," the German wooden clock, sonorously sounding in the silence of the house, loud over the breathing and teeth-grinding of the children beside her in the bed. "Get intae bed, noo," said the master, going off to the ben-room where he slept. She was left alone in the twilight gloom of the kitchen, and then she fell on her knees.

Long she knelt and long she sat thereafter on the bedside, with silent, unseen tears coursing her young face, and long it was before she unclothed herself and crept in beside the children in the chaff bed, while sleep came not to her even yet. The ticking clock kept her painfully awake. It struck two long before drowsiness came upon her, and the faint light of dawn was breaking through the uncurtained window. She was roused before five by her mistress calling to her. "Git up, lassie! ye maunna lat the morn slip by. D'ye hear?" Awaking, startled thus, for a moment she thought she was at home—for a moment thought that the voice was her mother's, and wondered in confusion at its harshness. But in a moment more she comprehended the change that had come to her, and her heart fainted within her. Quickly she got out

of bed and arrayed herself in the old faded skirt and dilapidated jacket, which she had brought rolled up in her bundle, and sallied out to the cows.

The sun shone cheerily, freshly, hopefully, almost tenderly, as oft he shines on May mornings. The dew lay heavy on the grass and gowans, and the gowans were still scarcely half awake. The cuckoo's voice came faintly from afar, from some point unknown in the wilderness of heath. A hundred larks were high above the corn land and the young grass, pouring out their souls in petulant song. The air was resonant of bird and early bee; and the cattle lowed aloud when they heard her footstep at the byre door. Mary felt the brightness, perhaps, too, a little of the hope and tenderness of the hour; and before she went into the byre, she went outside the little steading, and gazed over the wide-spread heath, so unlike her native braes. She thought of her distant mother and her vanished home, and her heart was swelling. But the cattle lowed again, and slowly she turned to her work, and raised the latch and entered the byre, speaking soft prow-ings to the beasts that were to be her charge.

She undid the neck chains quickly and turned the beasts' heads towards the door, and one by one they slowly, lumpishly, after the dull nature of them, began to move out, while she within stood speaking to them. Suddenly the gamekeeper stood at the byre door, impeding the cattle and inquired if her master was up.

"I hae na seed him," said the lassie. The man pushed his way past the beasts and stood beside her, speaking of the queys and the bright morning. Unexpectedly he seized her round the waist, and, taking her wholly by surprise, kissed her, ere she could resist or resent it. For the moment she was too stupefied to resent or resist, but then she burst into sobs and tears.

He was not an unkind man after his way. He let her go and spoke soft words to her, saying he only meant fun and kindness and had no thought to frighten her at all. "It's a way we hev' i' the countrae," he said. But it took some time to quiet her, and dry her tears, some time before she went out of the byre into the sunlight, trembling and scared.

She drove her beasts into the dewy grass of the pasture field, where still, on the turfy soil, the herbage grew sparsely and with many weeds; and her heart was still beating and like to burst. She sat down, in the brilliant morning, on the western margin of the field, beside the ditch, now dry, which the cattle sought as it were instinctively. "Ye'll be Hugh Davison's new lass," said a girl-voice from beyond the ditch. "He's gotten a lass noo! Am Sandy Fergison's dochter. What's yer name?" Mary had got up at the first words. She saw a girl of about her own age, also in charge of some cattle; and the sight of her cheered and strengthened Mary. Not that "Sandy Fergison's dochter" had in her or on her any thing to captivate or inspire the "new lass." It

was the girl-voice and the girl-figure that whispered to her of companionship, sympathy, hope. So Mary greeted the lassie warmly, and they quickly exchanged names and other scraps of personal information. Alexandrina, or "Ina" Ferguson as she was usually named, was the daughter of the conterminous crofter, and she spoke frankly and cheerfully to the stranger. Then Mary, in better mood, returned to the cottage. Her master was already afield with his horses, and her mistress on foot in the house.

There was plenty of work for the girl, drudgery, humble drudgery, no doubt, but she found herself not unkindly treated, and there was plenty to eat of the frugal kinds of food which the family used and which she shared with the family at the kitchen table. Fully occupied, her mind wandered not to the wakeful, painful thoughts of the night before. Making the porridge, she found appetite in its preparation, while the children talked to her, this one bidding her to "mak' it thick," that other to "laive mony knots intil 't." At night she lay down weary and slept, not hearing the wakeful clock at all. Nay, she took the youngest child to her bosom ere she went to sleep, so changed had the things and occupations of the long day left her.

John Bremner, the gamekeeper, did not again treat her rudely. He was often at the farm and in the house, and his words and ways were always kind. Indeed, Mrs. Davidson was somewhat influenced by him in the fair

treatment accorded to the girl. For during the first days, being a frequent visitor, he interfered now to excuse the lassie's physical weakness, now to extenuate her blunders or her awkwardness, so that sometimes she said in her heart, "He 's a kind fella, the keeper." Thus the days passed by and a month wrought a great change on the thin girl. She grew full and hearty on the oatmeal, and her work did not oppress her.

How fared it with her mother during this time? Well, you see, she was at the head of a great department, and therefore above the sympathy of the people around her; certainly without the sympathy of her employer, who expected her work to be done thoroughly because she was paid for it. Then, she was unaccustomed to command, and did not fully task the young woman who was her help in the byres, preferring to burden herself. Thus much fell to be done by herself—more, in fact, than was reasonable. To do it she had to work late and be up betimes to labour again, and after all many things were not done timeously. This old Fraser saw, this chiefly. He saw nothing of the many little improvements in the management of his dairy wrought by the widow. Therefore he grumbled and growled. "What, that ca-alf nae fed yet? If the day war lang as twa, ye'd fill it wi' sax hoors' wark." The widow's heart was heavy under such fault-finding, while her arms were weary with the hard strivings which still resulted in

little that was noticeable beyond the commonplace doings of her predecessors.

Then the gaunt old churl would charge her with unfaithfulness, not insinuating it, but bluntly saying it, "Ye maun hae maid awa' wi' the ile-cake! Whaur ever cud ye hae used a' yon o' it?" To the rigidly honest widow his suspicions were a sore trial; and her condition, alone, under the burden of her trust, was truly grievous to be borne. A mother's heart too will have its yearnings, and she had not heard of her daughter, her weak, inexperienced daughter since the term-day. And that last sight of her boy, Sandy, was very sad. Under all these things, you need not wonder that the widow grew thinner as the days grew long, that faintness oft beset her sad heart, and that oft her weary limbs grew feeble. Certainly the widow waned weaker in our Strath, while the daughter fattened and grew rosy on the muirlands, "over the hill and far away."

Indeed, Mary was changing, for, on the muirland, while she herded her cattle, with the children about her, pleasure tempted her. That gamekeeper came to her and the little ones, speaking kind words always, soft words sometimes. He told her she was fair and bonny, and, in her youth and sprightliness, she believed him. To be sure, if she was bonny she was also sadly unkempt; but this, although apparent enough, was fully made up for by her prettiness and budding womanhood. And under cover of showing that he

was pleased with her kindness to his little nephews and nieces, "tae encourage the lassie," he said, he bought her a quantity of ribbon, blue ribbon, well-worthy to tie up her hair, on Sundays, when she went to church. There was enough of it, too, for her black straw bonnet; and with native taste she trimmed the bonnet, and her poor unthinking heart was lifted up when thus she was arrayed. Then he met her and protested she was very charming, and she coyly submitted to be kissed by him, and neither cried nor pouted. She never thought of evil. How could she, poor toiling drudge, in her innocence, suspect that the gift was aught other than the kindly gift of a good heart? So she rose up early, day by day, and did her daily round of duty, and felt no burden in her labour, because she seemed to satisfy those around her whom it was her business to please. Her mind was at peace, and therefore her life was still and sunny as the bright days of summer on the circumjacent muirs, those muirs on which the gamekeeper often sought her.

His coming was often, yet in nowise so as to alarm her. It was his business to traverse the muirland, to wend his way early and late through peat haig and wide-spreading heather, even to the distant tarn, to seek the hoody craw, the sharp-sighted strong-winged falcon, and the no less destructive sea gull, which all came on predatory errand to the haunt of the heath cock. Why should he not come daily

to the farm of his sister "tae speir war they weel?" Was it otherwise than kindly "tae spake a lassie fair?" Was it other than truth to tell her she was "a bonny quean?"

Ina Ferguson said, "Folk dinna lik' Black Jock, the keeper. He comes ower aften haverin' aboot yer fairm. Mind yersel, lassie." Mary Macrae, as generous as she was innocent, was not pleased to hear evil insinuated against the man, of whom she knew nothing but kindness towards her and the bairns, her charge.

There came to the quickset hedge of the pasture-field, where Mary daily herded with Davidson's little ones, a strong voiced mavis, who had his dwelling in some neighbouring furzy brake, and he poured out his noontide song with such vehemence that his little breast and throat seemed bursting with the great soul of song within him. Daily he came and wildly warbled, and Mary and the little ones knew him and looked for his coming, and rejoiced in it. "Eh, Mary, look at it, lik' tae rive its neckie!" one little fellow would cry out when it came. "Dinna scare it spakin' oot!" the child girl of them would whisper, with finger pointing to the spray on which the bird rested. One day the gamekeeper came among them with his bass voice, asking how they were. "Wheesht, uncle, dinna gluff the throstle," said the bairns. "Look here," said he, and up went the deadly tube, which he always carried, and there was a flash and a bang which startled them all; and,

lo! the mavis had fallen from its twig, voiceless and motionless now, while a few of its speckled feathers were still fluttering downwards after it to the ground. There was a moment of frightened pause. Then the little boy ran forward and picked up the mutilated bird, and laid it in the lap of Mary Macrae, who burst into sobs and tears. "What for wad ye kill the throstle? What waey cud ye dae it?" she asked weeping.

"Whaur's the hairm o' killin' them trash?" asked the man gruffly. "But I didna ken ye set oucht upon it, or I wadna hae dune it. Ye look awfu' bonny greetin for 't. I'll kiss ye a' roond tae mak' ma paice for 't."

And he kissed the children, no doubt expecting to be entitled to kiss the maiden, but she would not suffer him. So he left them, not softened by her tenderness at all, but the rather inflamed, because she was good and innocent and tender-hearted, so unlike him.

In the last days of June, six brief weeks after her coming, the gamekeeper, being at our village, spent a crown piece in purchasing stuff for a printed frock for her,—a great gift, viewed and valued as such a gift could only be by one so young and in such need of better clothing. This present, although put on the ground of "kindness tae the lassie who haes sair need o' a new frock," opened the eyes of Mrs. Davidson to see something of her brother's heart. But "it wus nane o' her business. Why for shud she interfere? John can plaise himsel', an' tak' the rooin' o' it."

The lassie heard no voice save that which spoke the girlish dislike of Ina Ferguson, and that she heeded not. Of herself thinking no evil, and arrayed in this new garment and with those ribbons, her heart was puffed up, and life was pleasant, and she began to have but stray and few thoughts of the mother who a short time ago was to her and for her all in all.

CHAPTER II.

THE July market came, "the midsummer fair" at Glenaldie village. The gamekeeper managed with the Davidsons that the lassie should be allowed to go to it—to meet her friends and what not. Indeed, he suggested to her to claim the servant's privilege of going to the fair, and she, all too readily, seized it, longing truly to see her mother's face again when once thought of that face and hope of seeing it were given to her. No doubt, too, the brave new frock and bright blue ribbons stirred up in her womanly desires to appear on the market day.

Her mother had thoughts of the market and preparation for it also. Two days before it, old Fraser was very excited and surly. "Wull ye ne'er be dune potterin' aboot an' gie me detail an' waicht o' the butter and cheese?" he grumbled out, while the pale widow feebly strove to finish her ordinary work, so that she might go with him to the store room to

deliver up to him the dairy produce that it might be carried to the market. At length it was all weighed and set forth to him. "There maun be a mistake aboot it, wumman!" he grimly said. "There maun be a mistake somewhaur! It's full eicht stane butter an' mair nor I ever haed at midsammar, an' a great wheen mair cheese." He counted the wooden kits again, and the kebbocks that lay piled on forms along the room. There was no mistake at all; and he said gruffly, "I kent ye war a guid dey, an' vera carefu'." Too careful she was, in fact, for while he complimented her thus, the rows of cheeses went floating around her, and she staggered giddily among them to the wall. She was wholly exhausted. She must demit her charge and lie down on her uneasy bed.

When on the morrow she rose not, great was old Fraser's anxiety and distress, not on her account at all, but because "A' thing wad gae wrang." The cheapest way might be to find what ailed her, and Dr. Blake was sent for. To him, the source of the malady was apparent. The woman was done up, had never been fit for so much work as lay in these byres and dairy, and never would be fit to cope with it. It would take a couple of weeks to set her on foot at all. Great was old Fraser's distress, yet still not for the illness of the widow, superinduced by zeal in his service, but because his cows and beasts were without superintendence, his milk and cream without

due care. Grumbling and growling he went about the steading, making attempts to skim the milk himself, but, of course, bungling the operation. And now that the doctor said the woman's strength was insufficient for the work, would never suffice for it, he set himself coldly to think how he could get rid of her. It was fortunate that next day was the market day. He might find somebody "tae dae his turn," and, at least, he would try.

John Bremner, the gamekeeper, was to guide the maiden by the short cut, through muir and moss, to the village, on the morning of the fair. By nine o'clock, she met him on the heath a mile off, at the spot he had pointed out to her the night before, even at "The Elf Cairn," the knowe that rose in a round green cone from the circling waste of heather. He praised her appearance, her beauty, and he kissed her when they met. "The feys lauch whan there's kissin' on the Elf cairn," he said. But it was a morning for laughter. The sun was shining in his July strength Scarcely a puff of wind was there to move the heath bells. The perfume of the mountain thyme hung heavily in the stagnant, sultry air. And away they went through the heather, pathed only by the sheep tracks, making for a hollow in the distant ridge on their sky-line, which the man pointed out to her, telling her it was above the farm of Braefoot, and scarcely a mile and a half from the village. It was a glorious wilderness of sunlight and purple interspersed

with green. At first they were alone in it, as they passed through the scattered flocks which filled the air with cries for wandering lambs. They startled the grouse in coveys as they passed along. But a mile or two on their way, they came upon a shepherd sheltering from the sun under a peat bank, while he smoked his pipe. With him the gamekeeper sat a while, smoking also, and when they got up to proceed, two women were coming through the moss about half a mile off. Mary was certain that one of them was Ina Ferguson, and desired to wait for her, but the keeper would not wait. He put his arm round her waist, with rural licence, and hurried her forward.

And as they went he promised her a handsome "fairin'," and to take her to the peep-shows and the other entertainments of the fair, and he kissed and tugged at her in the way rude wooers will, and in such way as must have alarmed her if she had not known he was so kind. But she was not alarmed, and could not refuse him kisses, seeing that he took pleasure in them. And they left the women in the far distance, and at length, heated and tired, they reached the hollow on the sky-line, and looked down upon Glenaldie Strath and the village below them. Here there was a spring of water, and eagerly she stooped down on hands and knees that she might drink of the cool stream. But he took her by the waist and raised her. She must drink from his flask-cup and take some whisky with the water. This she

would not do, preferring to drink of the water pure, whereupon he scoffed and spoke roughly and was somewhat out of temper. "Ye beit tae tak' a dram frae me on the market-day, since ye hae come wi' me as ma lassie." But still she would not, and he scowled as he put up his flask. Then, for the first time, the maiden shrank from him, feeling in a dim way that she did not know him; feeling all the disparity of their years and conditions in life; feeling that all the acts of freedom which she had suffered as rough kindnesses to her, a little girl, might, possibly, be very wrong. For the first time, too, she thought of herself as a woman; thought also of the slaughter of the mavis. Her heart misgave her sorely, and she was like to cry. He renewed his blunt and kindly speeches as they went on their way, but her misgivings and her fear remained. It was half-past eleven when they reached the village.

Bremner had some things to do in the village, and he shewed her where he would meet her at two o'clock. Then he gave her half-a-crown as a fairing, and went on his business. She wandered about in the crowd, looking for "kent faces" from the Langrig Braes, looking especially for mother and brother, proudly feeling the grandeur of her new print frock and decorations, feeling also the richness of that piece of money, her doubt of the donor quite gone in the excitement of the fair. Soon she found John, her younger brother, gaily eating oat-cake while he held his mistress's horse,

unyoked beside her cart laden with butter and cheese. He was "weel and gey cosy in his plaice," he said. And he told her that Sandy was somewhere on the market-ground, for he had seen him. But he had seen and heard nought of his mother. Then the girl went in quest of Sandy, and when she had wandered long in the crowd she found him. He was a stolid laddie and had little outward show of affection for her, little concern to express for his widowed mother. But he had not seen his mother, and was sure she was not at the fair. Knockdry, however, was not far away. He pointed it out to her on the hill-side. If she desired to see her mother two hours would bring her there and back.

While they were talking, a murmur ran through the crowd, and the people jostled and pushed aside and opened up a way for a cart which slowly passed through the throng in the village Square. It was a cart filled with straw, in which lay something rolled up in a blanket, which might be a corpse, but which quickly they heard people say was "a sick wife ta'en hame tae the village." At the unwonted and mournful spectacle Mary shuddered. "Save us a'!" said she. "Touns is awfu' plaices! the leevin' carried lik' deid." But thought of the melancholy sight was quickly pushed from her by the bustling, shoving crowd, laughing, chaffing, gruffly babbling in the sweltering summer day. It was odd, was it not, that the girl had no recollection of the pain she endured

when last she stood in the Square? But truly, in more than one way she was another creature, for she was full of health and blood and spirit, with the sense of womanhood freshly awakened in her. Presently it was two o'clock, and with Sandy she pressed her way to her rendezvous with the gamekeeper.

There he was waiting for her. No doubt he had had some drink, for he was in overflowing spirits. He was glad to see Sandy. "He cudna help bein' gled to see the brither o' his winsome lass," and he must treat them. In the Square were many places of entertainment, tents constructed of many pieces of wooden framework, over which were spread and bound blankets and plaids. These were erected at regular intervals of six paces apart on the eastern side of the Square, and thither they must go with him. Sandy went readily in respect of the prospective dram. Mary would fain have declined to go. "Na, plaise," she said, "cam' and show me the sichts," for from her earliest days the market booths had been impressed on her mind as "the tents of sin." But the man insisted. "What for wad she no hae a bun and laimanaid? Wus it tae cross him?" and with hanging head and conscience pricking her, he led her away to the booths, with his strong arm round her waist.

He led her into a tent, where were many people clustered at rough tables, drinking, flirting, shouting; and in a corner was a fiddler playing away briskly. He would have led her into the midst of the throng, but

she would not go. She would not pass beyond the table next the door, although he pressed her forward with such violence as he dared use. All her doubt and her fear of him came back with tenfold force. He called for cakes and whisky and "the laimanaid." Sweet cakes and whisky he promptly got, but the lemonade was run out. "Then ony ither fuzzin' stuff," he cried, but there was none. He had swallowed his dram and so had Sandy. "Bring mair whisky," he shouted to the waiting woman. "Noo, Mary, ye maun tak' a dram frae me," he said, and he set a glass of whisky in her hand. "Plaise, Mr. Bremner, am no for 't," said she.

She sat trembling with this cup of iniquity in her hand, for indeed she regarded it as unmitigated evil. That was the creed she had been reared to believe. And if she had drunk it, the first great step of her soul's demoralisation had been wrought out, because she would have felt that she had done wickedly. But while she sat trembling on the brink of the wrong-doing, still feebly saying, "Oh, am no for't," Ina Ferguson passed by, staring into the tent as she went. And Ina, catching sight of her, came directly forward and stood before her. "Mary Macraw!" said she, "dae ye ken o' yer mither, an' ye sittin' there drinking?" In an instant the glass was set down, half emptied in the process by her trembling hand, and Mary was up, asking, "What o' my mither?"

"Ye shud ken yersel'," said Ina, with blunt

vehemence. "She's deein'! She was carried the day tae ma auntie's, tae be nigh the doctar! Ye're her dochtar, I believe!"

Then Mary, with her face blenching through its sun-browned skin, and with quivering lip, begged the girl to guide her to her mother. She asked Sandy to go with her. For the gamekeeper she had no words. He gripped her rudely and would have detained her; asked her to tryst him again at the same place in an hour, in two hours, or three hours hence. She did not, could not, answer him, would not be detained, but hurried to her mother.

The fact was that old Fraser had early in the day found on the market ground a woman large-boned and able-bodied, suitable for his dairy. "Gae hame, Jock," said he thereupon to his ploughman. "Ye need fetch the seek widow wi' a cairt tae the town here-awa', tae be by han' the doctar. By the time ye're yokin' and here I'll hae a plaice fixt for her," and the man obeyed the order. The farmer resorted to Widow Ferguson in the Back Street, whom he had known in former days, and to whom, since her widowhood, he had sent a yearly boll of potatoes at harvest time. She, he thought, would take in widow Macrae in her illness and keep her till her restoration to health. He was ready to pay her, too, for the service, not with his coin, however, but with the widow's own money, for she had earned about a third part of her wages. He came to Widow Ferguson

and told the hardship of his case, in having on his hands this sick widow who never would be fit for his work. "I maun send her oot o' yon. It'll nae dae tae be ruined wi' a doctar's beell, like I'd be if she bides at Knockdry." He offered a pound, saying it "wad surely keep her the twa weeks the doctar says she'll tak'." And Widow Ferguson agreed to receive her, did so, fully conscious that it might rest with her to have the burden of this patient on her hands and in her house for months. She saw, too, that the hard grudging man cared not save to transfer his own burden to other shoulders, caring not how feeble those shoulders might be. The vulgar rich may calculate and grudge. The poor are full of sympathy for their fellow-sufferers, will ofttimes sacrifice of their little to succour sufferers greater than they who have nought at all. Thus it was that Widow Macrae was carted through the fair. She was "the sick auld wife" whose case had caused Mary to shudder.

Well the widow knew that the reason for her hasty removal was but a pretext, that the truth was that the farmer wanted to rid himself of her; and while she asked the women to collect her few garments that she might prepare to go, her poor heart died within her, for truly the iron heel of poverty was sorely pressing on her soul. "He'll be pittin' me on the Boord" she thought, and the thought was misery and keenest pain. "Weel, weel," she said, "it's a true word, 'Whan thou art ould anither shall gird thee an' cairry thee whither thou wouldest not.'" But ere she was ready

for the way, for her faintness made her pause often in her humble dressing, she had resigned herself to the will and way of Providence. "He kens what's best for me! He aye kens and sees till't." What else could she do? When man turned her out, rejected and despised her, what refuge had she but her trust in Him that ruleth all things? They helped her into the cart, spread a blanket over her as she lay therein and sent her forward to the village.

The heat of the sun and her mind's turmoil made her very ill by the time she reached the village. In crossing the Square, bitterness even as of death encompassed her soul, as the hoarse roar of the market-place broke around her. A vision came to her of the many market days of pride and pleasure which she had spent in that throng. And forthwith she could have cried out in agony, for she was thinking that out there in the heedless multitude were probably her children, unconscious, perhaps heedless of her fate. Well, well, it is a sad, sore world. Most happy phase of it that some few good Samaritans, more doubtless than are known to fame, are scattered over its surface.

Widow Ferguson went kindly out to her stricken sister, to help to fetch her from the cart into her earth-floored room. And indeed the sister widow was sorely stricken, even so that she seemed to be wandering in her mind. "Am come, ye see," she said hysterically, "i' ma chariat, a puir craitar, but i' ma chariat, na less;—sommat o' a chariat o' fiery trubbilation, lik'

what He aft gies them wha lo'e him." She had to be lifted down from the cart and carried in, and there she was laid on the low bed, with her widow's cap so clean and white framing her poor thin white face; her eyes closed in weakness, perhaps, too, in despair, so that she looked more like a corpse than a living woman. Then it was that Ina Ferguson from the Newlands came to visit her aunt, the tenant of that humble room. "Wha's that i' the bed, auntie?"

"Widow Macraw."

"Widow Macraw! that maun be the mither o' ma neebar lassie."

"Is she o' the marcat?—Gang oot and gie her word o' what's happened," said the aunt.

Then Ina briefly told what she knew and thought of the patient's daughter.

Dr. Blake had either noticed or heard of the sorrowful procession of that cart through the market-place, and, full of indignation, he was quickly at the bedside. The patient was seriously exhausted. He got some one to fetch a bottle of wine from his house, and made her drink a liberal glass of it. He would send her beef tea presently, for beef tea in plenty and quiet would yet bring her round, he said. And while he was speaking in rushed Mary, followed stolidly by her brother. When the girl saw the wan, worn face, "Oh! she'll dee!" she cried. "An' I wusna mindin' I haed a mither! God forgie me!" and she threw herself sobbing on the little bed.

I dare say it is good to weep when the heart is conscious of wrong, as Mary's heart was conscious now. One look into her mother's face had recalled all the mother's anxious love, all the mother's earnest struggles in their long day of privation. While she wept by her mother's side and over her, Sandy shuffled to the bedside awkwardly. "It's a' I hae," he said, and he set down three half-crowns on the bolster. "That's a good lad," said the doctor. "Mind your mother, lad, and God won't forget you." Mary would fain have laid down her half-crown, too, but now to her, thoroughly awakened, it somehow seemed a treacherous, sinful coin, and she did not, could not lay it down for the mother's use.

Dr. Blake encouraged them all. "She'll come round very quickly," he said. "Your mother is not much over forty? Quite a young woman, in fact. You can knit and spin?" he asked her kindly. "No doubt of it! You'll make a living nicely yet. But you must not think again of heavy work. You are not fit for that." And a cordial better than kind words or wine was warming the poor woman's heart and reviving her, in the faces of the children she loved. Nor you nor I can tell or guess how her heart had yearned for her bairns, longed and yearned to behold them in those hard days of toil that had wasted and worn down her life.

When hours had passed, Mary said she must go out for a little. She would come quickly back to her mother

she said. Widow Ferguson followed her to the door. "Ye're a guid-hairted quean," said the widow, "an' am mindit tae warn ye."

"What o'?" asked Mary hurriedly, for she was in haste.

"O' Black Bremner, the keeper, lassie. He haes snared and wranged hairts afore yers, puir thing! The curse is upon him, an' he'll nae escaip it," she answered assuredly.

Mary broke out into weeping. "I ken somethin' o' it noo," she said. "On ma waay tae yer door, I seed Jean i' the passin'. It's sair on ma hairt is ma folly," and she went on her way.

He came forward just a little inebriated, with a deal of leering, to welcome the girl, blear-eyed with weeping. "I kent ye wad come back, ma bonny bird!" he cried as he clutched at her extended hand. "Whate'er's this?" he asked, looking in wonder at the half-crown piece which she had contrived to pass into his palm.

"I canna hae it! I maunna keep it!" she said, as she wrenched herself from his grip and stood facing him.

"What the diel's cam' ower ye?" he angrily asked.

"I winna hae ony man's siller that's no lik' me and that dinna lo'e me," she answered gently.

"Wha spake o' looin' ye, ye fule!" said he quite out of temper.

"Mair need that I shudna be boon' by yer siller," said she with tears. "Ye war laidin' me i' slippry waeys, an' noo I see it, we maun pairt. I'll no gang forrit for siller or braws.'

Then in his anger and whisky, he swore at her and called her an ill and ugly name. And in the market-place, with the people now crowding around them, she said to them, "May be I deserve it, friens," and she took off her long neck ribbon of blue and flung it down, undid her bonnet, tore off the trimming and flung it away, while he cursed and swore and called her "fule" again and again. "If I haed ony duds, the puirest, I wad strip aff the goun tae, but I canna dae it the noo," she said.

"Hoorah for the lassie!" shouted some.

"Ho, ho! Black Bremner! ye're diddled an' dune by ane lass!" cried others.

"Tak' anither glaiss, John!" and in his wrath and drink he would have struck her, but strong men held his arms, and earnest women came about the girl. "He haesna wranged ye, puir thing?" they asked. "Na, thank God!" she said in her tears, and they led her away through the throng.

Of course, Mary did not return that night to the Newlands under the escort of the gamekeeper. When she did go home, it was with Ina Ferguson and in the cart of one of the neighbouring crofters, in which half-a-dozen other women were also homeward borne. On the road, as they jogged along,

the women discussed the incidents of the day, and great as had been the fair, the passage of the cart from Knockdry, and Mary's "outcast" with Bremner, were the most interesting features of it for those who knew the man and her. The women all agreed that she "haed dune the richt thing but i' a wrang waey a' thegither," and of the truth of the latter part of the proposition Mary was fully conscious now. "I' deed an' trouth, I wadna be in yer shoon for saxpence aince Hugh Davidson's wife cam' tae heer o' it," said they all with one voice. Mary, half crying, said her mistress had always been kind to her. "Weel, may be ye ne'er crossed her. She's an ill ane whan pit til't." Thus the poor girl was full of fear and apprehension when she got to the little farm in the gloaming.

And although her return was quite timeous, yet in the way ill news will travel, the notable things of the fair had already been reported at Davidson's fireside, and due prominence given to Mary's rupture with his brother-in-law. Mrs. Davidson was full of indignation and resentment. That "sic a demure jaud o' a lassie as that shud pit a brave man lik' John Bremner tae shaim, an' gie him a red face, i' the licht o' day an' afore folk," was a thing intolerable. "The baggage 'll neer venture wi' in airm's length o' me! Am certain she'll nae cam' back! An' we'll hae her jiled for't, Hugh! jiled though it cost us oor best coo, the slee limmer!"

But there came the girl in the gloaming, disappoint-

ing the woman's expectation of revenge through the Statute "anent* servants in husbandry," and her coming surprised the woman not a little. "Ay, ye're plaisit tae cam' hame, Mem," she said, when the girl with faltering step had got into the centre of the kitchen. "Ye're plaisit tae cam' hame, an' a bonny day ye hae haid o' it." Not wholly certain of the temper of her mistress, not very certain of what she herself was saying, the girl made answer, "It wus a vera guid day."

"An' whaur, I wunner, did ye pairt wi' John Bremner? Am hearin' tell ye war passin' kind till him i' the town!" Then the girl saw that the worst was already known, and she stood mute before the accuser. Interpreting her silence as an admission of all she had been told, the woman went at her, "Ye fause-hairted, double-faced limmer! Ye'd bruik the man's claes on yer back, though ye'd redden his face i' the thrang! Hoo daur ye cam' intae hoose o' mine i' the dark o' nicht? Wha kens the warthless loun ye hae been gallivantin' an' foregaitherin' wi' i' the road? I'll no hae ye tae cam' in here i' the dark o' nicht! Mak' awa wi' yersel' whaur ye hae been o' the day, or ma neif'ill fin' yer lug."

The lassie stood on the floor not comprehending what was said; and as she stood, the woman came to her and struck her with her hard hand a slap that made the room resound. "Strip aff that goun this minut'," she said, and the children awakened by the din, sat

up in their bed and added their voices to the clamour. She was going to strike the girl again, but old Davidson came from the ben-room, saying, "Wife, haud yer han'! There maun be nae fechtin' here."

"I'll no thole her an hoor under the same roof wi' me!" cried the fury.

"May be that," said her husband. "But we'll hae nae fustiwark tae mak' ill waur."

"Mak' her pit aff ma brither's claes then!"

"Ye better dae it," said the man.

Mary divested herself of the print frock and laid it on the bed.

"Noo! oot wi' ye! Aff this minut'!" cried the woman, and she shoved the girl from the door.

This is an unpleasant narrative. It was certainly a hard thing to undergo, to be stripped and turned out in the dark night thus. She stood "greetin'" a while "at the end of the house." Then she dried her tears somewhat and crept into the byre beside the cattle. And how came she to dry her tears? For this cause solely, that she said to herself, "Thank God! I dinna drenk his whisky!" She could divest herself, nay, she was already bared of all the material things that the man had given to her. If she had sinned in drinking, she felt she could never have wholly put away the evil from her. She had her poor consolation, even in her dire distress.

Day breaks early on our hills in July, and with returning light came some diminution of her sense of

present evil, some ease to her exhausted mind, although her plight was grievous enough. There was no course open to her save to return to her poor sick mother. It was hard to heap this trouble upon the mother's personal affliction, but "it cudna be helpit noo." And yet to leave the place wrung the poor girl's heart; for the bairns, the first children she had closely known, were dear to her, so that the pain of parting from them gave point and soreness to the mode of her leaving them.

She would have gone away at daybreak, but her clothes, poor clothing truly, "the auld duds" of the Whitsunday, yet indispensable to her, were in the house and she must needs get them out. So she sat down once again in the morning sunshine, in keener pain of soul than on that morning when first she went forth into the pasture field as the new servant of the farm. At length, Hugh Davidson came out to send the cattle to the grass, and finding her, he spoke to her not unkindly. "Ye'll be waitin' for yer claes, nae doot. Noo, the mistress is nae up yet, sae gang in wi'oot speech, an' tak' the duds an' awa wi' ye. It's nae guid yer staipin' here." So she went into the house that was no longer her home, and put on her the things which she must wear, collected her other things and tied them up in an apron. And the clock ticked aloud in the silent dwelling, which, with the hearth unlighted, looked cold and cheerless and eiry. She looked on the sleep-

ing children, "Fair fa' the puir bairns!" she said; then, hearing Mrs. Davidson astir in the other room, she hastily departed.

Ina Ferguson met her not far from the house. "That's what haes cam' o' it? Whaur dae ye haud for?" This inquiry opened up all her miserable position, for her only course was to seek shelter with Ina's aunt, and how was she, what right had she, to be sheltered and fed there? Her young life had surely become involved and burdened and, for a moment, she could have wished her life was ended. But Ina asked the question again, and the girl painfully replied that she was bound to her mother, that with her was her only chance of shelter. "I dinna ken what waey auntie 'll dae? Her bit is sma'. But ye maun cam' tae ma faither's, an' break yer fast ere ye tak' the hull."

Mary went with her, and they gave her food. Old Ferguson encouraged her too. She should make the Davidsons pay her wages. The harvest must be early also this warm, dry summer, and she would readily find work in the Strath. So she left them before midday and started by the hill ground for the village. She carried her bundle on her arm, and, after the custom of her class, she did the journey bare-footed, bearing her shoes in her hand.

You know that she had traversed the hill just the day before, but then in the gaiety of her heart, she had attended little to the way. Now, in her sadness, she wandered off the track and greatly increased the

length of her journey. Weary as she was for want of sleep, dispirited by the events which had befallen her, her wandering was painful, for want and homelessness stared her in the face, so that often she sat down to cry. Then in crossing a patch of burnt heath, more trouble came to her, for as she went eagerly forward, she trode on a heather stump, hardened by the fire, and it penetrated the ball of her right foot, so that to extract it needed a great wrench. Only a few drops of blood oozed from the ragged puncture, but when she had limped a little way it became very painful and the injured part swelled a great deal. She sat down to rest, but when she got up again, the foot and ankle joint were stiffened and sore, so that the last mile of the hill was really distressing work.

At last she reached the well in the hollow of the hill-top, and dejected and weary she sat by it. Was she the same girl who, only twenty-four hours before, with laughter and bright thoughts, sparkling as the well itself, had drunk of the stream? Too true it is that calamity is most often nigh to us when the heart is lightest. She washed her bleared eyes, and tried to calm herself, in the view of the valley and village which now seemed close at hand. When she was rested, she set out on what seemed the last stage of her journey, but still she found the injured foot more painful to use. She got upon the farm road, and passed the comfortable steading and the new farm-

house there, and she trudged and limped along. And as she limped, her injured foot chanced to rest on something which came into contact with the sore. Instinctively to relieve it, the left foot was hastily advanced, and in this action she knocked her bare toes against a stone, stripping them of the skin and causing them to bleed amain. This new misfortune quite undid her. She sat down in the ditch by the road side to inspect her feet with eyes that were blinded with her tears.

"The Lord be aboot us! Ye gied me a start, lass!" Mary looking up from the ditch saw a tall, gaunt man, with his hat heavily trimmed with crape and his throat loosely wrapped by a white muffler with black spots. "Wha are ye?" he asked, intently gazing at her.

"I hae hurtit ma feet," she said.

"Puir thing!" he said. "Whaur's yer hame? Hae ye far tae gang?"

"I haena nae hame!" she answered, breaking into tears afresh. "I scairce ken whaur I'm gaein'."

"Odds! that's vera bad! Ye're but a young thing!" She was silent. "Deed ye gliffed me!" he went on. "Whan I seed ye wi' the wick o' ma e'e, sittin' there greetin', ye war sae lik' a puir thing we beeried twa week syne. Oich, oich!" said the lanky man, still surveying her wistfully.

"What way will I win tae the village?" asked she, looking at him through her tears.

"I'll tell ye that," he answered. "Ye cam' up tae the square, and rest ye a bit, and get a cloot for yer taes. Come awa', puir queanie!" and he took her hand and helped her out of the ditch, saying, "Noo, ca' canny." Submissively she hirpled after him to the farm-stead. He led her into the kitchen of the farm-house by the back door, and bade her sit down. "Am maister here, lassie; an' they ca' me Jaimes Moffat. I'll sen' ben the wumman tae ye."

A woman came and gave her a rag to bind her bleeding toes, but could find nothing to tie round the swollen right foot. And while Mary sat, seeing all things around her as in a dream confused, James Moffat returned.

"Confoond it, woman!" he cried, "hae ye nae given her water to wash her feet? Gae, fetch it stracht! Ye hae nae mair sense than a nowt! Noo, lassie," he continued, "ye hae nae hame, ye sed. What's yer name an' whaur ye gaein'?"

"Am Mary Macraw, an' ma mither's yont i' the village sceck."

"Hoo! I hae ye noo! But ye canna be the brave lass that shaimed black Jock Bremner yestreen at the fair?"

"Jist a' that's for her," said Mary shamefacedly, "An' I tint ma plaice through it."

"Na, lassie," he said to her kindly, "dinna blush for 't. Ye did weel an' braively. Ye maun bide a wee an' get some mait, comin' off the hull. An' I ken aboot yer mither. I telt Fraser he was a dottrel

fule! The eediat haid as muckle mair butter an' cheese by ordinair, that wad pay her cost and wage oot ower an' agen, though he keepit her tae skim the milk an' see till the kirnin' an' nae mair. 'Aith, she wadna gang by Braefut for a hame were she weel the day. Och, och! lassie! ye're unco lik' the puir thing that's noo gane frae us. It's a sair warld, lassie!" and again he went away.

She had her feet washed and bound up and was supplied with food. There was a cart going to the village with a drill harrow after six o'clock, and so she rested till that hour, and was then conveyed into the Back Street. The stricken mother was too deep in affliction much to feel this aggravation of distress. "Weel, weel!" she said. "*He* warks his ain waey. We canna onderstan' it! We're puir things a'!" Widow Ferguson had expected this result of yesterday's outbreak. They had one common comfort which was this, that not more than three weeks lay between them and harvest, and Sandy's half-crowns would keep the girl in meal for so long. Mary told them that the farmer at Braefoot had offered her harvest work, but kindly as he had entreated her, her mind rebelled against returning to him if her sickle could find employment elsewhere. No wonder, for her soul was full of deadly fear of accepting the kindnesses of man. "He's anither kind athegither is Jaimes Moffat," said Widow Ferguson. "He used ainee tae tak' a bit booze i' the inn, but am telt he 's gien it

ower clean e'er since the mason's dochter took badly. She's deid, puir lassie! and beeried, weeks gane by."

"Be lik' he was fond o' her?" asked Mary.

"Folk clavers as muckle."

"Puir man!" said the maiden, as she thought of his feeling as he had traced some resemblance of the dead girl in herself. Then, too, she saw that there might be another form of kindness and tenderness in the heart of man besides that miserable, hideous spectre of it which had tempted and assailed her.

She was not, however, to search out the specialities of Moffat's character at that time. Before his crops were ripened for the harvest, even before the first of August, Dr. Blake procured for her an engagement at Fernbank shooting lodge, in her native braes of Langrig. There the Rev. Mr. Cresswell, an English clergyman, had had for many years a modest establishment, at which with his wife he spent the three months of autumn yearly, sometimes a month or two of spring. He enjoyed his little bit of grouse-shooting in the way in which it is most to be enjoyed, walking for the exercise chiefly, accompanied over the hill-ground by his wife in good weather, shooting game for his table only, with a few brace at times for friends. To Fernbank, then, the young girl went as undermaid of all work, a fortnight before Moffat came to ask her to join his harvest-band. The worthy man was disappointed. He found her mother spinning at the fireside, in health almost restored. She had got her wheel and

gearing brought in by a cart which came laden with peat for sale. But finding the daughter gone, said the farmer, "Wumman, I'm mindit ye can be o' guid tae me and nae hurt tae yoursel'. Dinna ye mak' ony change till I'll see ye whan the corn is in. I canna spaik freely o' it the noo, bein' tae be busy wi the hairst."

And Moffat did see her in the first days of October. His proposal was, "I gie ye, Widow Macraw, twa notes. That's nae muckle, but I'll gie ye a plaice for yersel' an' yer cost. I'll no ask muckle wark o' ye, but ye'll hae the key o' the milk, and the weicht o' the hens, an' ye'll see tae the milkin' and the kirnin', and ye'll be sponsible for the produce. I'm nae pittin' aff ane o' the dames that's on the toun the noo."

And the widow accepted the offer thankfully, and at Martinmas went to Braefoot. Truly James Moffat was [illegible]se in his generation. Being unmarried, a pru[illegible] conscientious woman was very valuable. She [illegible] been with him ten years, and he says himself, "That auld wife's mair tae me nor twa score poons ilka year since she came tae me. It's wunnerfu' what a hantel siller cam's oot o' a wheen hens' nests an' the lik'." But it never will occur to him to increase the widow's wages from the original two pounds by the half year. "She has nae need o' mair wages! Wha's complainin'?" asks he.

But indeed the Widow Macraw has much reason for gratitude to both providence and him, for her days are

full of usefulness, plenty, and peace. And her daughter Mary is the mistress of that farm-house and steading to which ten years ago she followed the kindly man, halt and blear-eyed with weeping. Somehow he had fixed in his mind that she was the image of one whom he had loved and lost, lost by death, that form of loss which gives liveliest impress of loveliness gone from us. And this Mary whom he now has, has many qualities which suit her to be the wife of James Moffat, in which the love he lost was wholly lacking. Good sense is so much better than sentiment in the every-day work of life, such work and life as are presented on farm-steadings. But in many ways Mary Macraw has improved the conditions of her husband's life. Bound to him by gratitude as well as affection, his happiness is her first object. And to the simple, kindly man, she is dawtie and darling and all. I, friend of the worthy pair, stand by beholding and am glad. Once and again he has asked me whether I did not think her "vera lik' puir Lizzie Mowat." But looking at this buxom, full-sized woman, I can trace no resemblance to our dear dead friend. I can only account for Moffat's fancy by deeming that he is specially retentive of his first impression, that vision of the tearful face of the young girl as she sat weeping by the way-side.

HETTY.

CHAPTER I.

THE mill stands down in the hollow, nearly half a mile below the main street of our village. Through the open spaces of the feus, glimpses may be had of the tops of the ash-trees which encompass it, of the top, also, of the old circular kiln which forms part of its ancient masonry. If you follow the course of the mill-burn from its divergence from the village road, descending into the valley, you come speedily to the little plateau on which the mill-dam is constructed. Here, from the edge, you see all the sweetness of the spot where the old mill stands. A clump of good old trees surrounds it, the ash and the gean-tree, stately and frondescent, overshadowing, as nearer to you, the apple-trees beside the mill cottage, which, whitewashed and gay with roses and geraniums, faces the south-east. Hard by, in front of the cottage, on the edge of a rugged bank, stands the queer old mill, with its whirling wheel and its ceaseless clatter, which comes softened up the vale-side. Green is the

sward of the mill-croft pasture which lies this side of the tree clump; tall and luxuriant are the grain-crops of the croft. You see the secret of its verdure in the warm and sheltered dell, amply moistened by the drainage of the lands above. It is a picture of peace and beauty. Pleasure and plenty seem combined and abiding in it, for the little scene, picturesquely complete, so satisfies the eye that the mind, accepting the pleasure, fills up the picture with people industrious, virtuous, and happy. But this fair spot is not ever brightened by sunshine, not ever redolent of roses. Autumn will sweep away its foliage. The bitter north wind will blare adown the glen, and brawl around the kiln and cottage. Ice will lock the mill-wheel, and gag the clattering hopper. Just so, all human story is chequered by alternating light and shadow.

In my young days, the mill was as picturesque and pretty, every whit, as now. Probably it was then that its flowers and lesser embellishments were brought to it, for William Allan, then its tenant, was a man of taste and aspiration to gentility, who was fain to sink the miller in the loftier title of "corn merchant," to make the mill a mere accessory of a more important trade. How those days come back to one, seeming so close when thought of apart from the many things that fill up the long, long years 'twixt now and then—those sunny days when I was a boy, proud of my hazel wand and on trouting bent. Then, often I wandered by the burn-side, under the ashes and along the mill-

lead, seeking farther down the strath the river, for which also the mill-stream was bound. There was in those days something captivating about the old mill and its charming cottage, into the muslin drapery of whose windows I so often dreamily stared as I passed by. I did not know the miller, save as by sight I knew the other magnates of the district; that is, I knew his handsome horse and gig as well as I knew him. It was all for a blink of his bonny daughter, Hetty, his only child, that thus I would stare at the cottage muslin screens.

I did not know the miller's Hetty, although thus I watched for her, not knowing why I watched. I dare say it shall ever be that boyish hearts will go beating for fair girl faces, laughing, through eyes of blue, amid tangled, flaxen ringlets, although the boy may know no reason for this throbbing, may comprehend nothing of what moves him save that here is a little girl, so pretty. I sought no knowledge of her, knowing her little name only by some chance exclamation heard as I passed by, sought nothing but glimpses of the girlish grace of her beside the flower-embellished cottage. The mill-stream was a round-about way to the river, and, indeed, did not lead to the pool where I was wont to fish, yet it was my boyish way to the Aldie.

Sometimes among the flowers I saw Hetty's mother, the miller's wife, a thin-faced, pale-faced person, with a look of care, as if amid the prettiness and the plenty which surrounded her she had no realisation of plea-

sure, had even an existing unhappiness. How could I guess her secret sorrows? I did not think of her. When near the mill, I had eyes only for the pretty Hetty—centre of many a boyish dream.

Hetty was about eleven, I was two years older. I was a truant boy; she, the petted of her father, his only child, his great delight, his pride, his treasure. He often had her by his side in the village street, on market days, heavily clothed in rich things which must have oppressed her tender youth. He was a speculative man, having little or no capital wherewith to speculate, as I afterward came to know. He may have had his dreams and hopes of the child, seeing her, in fancy, the well-endowed wife of some of the wealthy young farmers whose corn he bargained for.

Her father was not a prepossessing man. Although he dressed better than the rich men of the country side, in town-made surtout, affecting even the unusual luxury of gloves, his clothes did not fit easily to him, and he seemed dressed out of his natural style. The farmers looked, what they were, men of substance, needing no exterior show to bespeak the [illegible] He seemed to affect to be wealthy, and to seek [illegible]llow proclamation of wealth by his expenditure. [illegible]at time I did not know that the farmers looked [illegible] with doubt, and stood aloof from him, [illegible] a stranger, had taken the mill and mill-[illegible] the head" of the previous miller, at a [illegible] of rent; still looked askance at him,

although now five years had gone by since he came among them. Our farmers are slow to form new friendships. If you, a stranger, offer them sixpence extra for their produce, in ready cash, they will deal with you, will offer you their grain at the higher price before they sell it elsewhere at a lower; but it will take many years before they regard you otherwise than as the mere medium of their advantage, having scant sympathy for you if prices go down while your stock, purchased from them, is heavy, feeling aggrieved if prices advance after their sales to you are completed. Specially were they thus hard and "dour" with Allan, whose footing among them at the first had been obtained through the disappointment of an old familiar. But still another cause operated in this case. A wide district was astricted to Glenaldie Mill, and Allan, who had bound himself for a high rent, insisted that mill dues must be paid to him on all the grindable corn. He was somewhat sharp about this, within the measure of his right of course, but the farmers thought it oppressive and used as a means to compel sales of grain to him. In fact, he was not liked.

What was that to pretty Hetty or to me? You know I had never spoken to her, had merely picked up her pet name by some chance exclamation of it, as I went by the mill. Thus I cannot tell whether she wondered why she was not asked about to the houses of the big farmers. Mayhap she never thought of it at all, as I did not. Mayhap she was contented

with her pretty little home, and deemed the brawling of the mill-stream and the hopper's clatter more pleasant than the voices of strangers. I often heard her laughing in the little flower-plot before the cottage as if she needed no more pleasure to fill her cup of glee.

Very sunny were those evenings long ago, and I was very fond of trouting. Little Hetty, I think, came to expect my passing; she was very regularly in the flower plot. Sometimes she came to the little gate when I had gone by, and stared after me as I wandered down the stream, the bright blue eyes, shaded by her hand from the evening sunshine, peering half shyly, half curiously, as she clung with her right arm to the gate-post. Sometimes the mother was with the child so bright and happy, and the contrast between them was great, for the mother looked careworn and weary, so that even my boy's eyes must see it, and I must wonder why it was. Surely she must have fulness of joy in that child, that home. I did not know how many things her hands had to do to make and maintain that aspect of beauty in her home; not at all could I guess that her share of her husband's burdens well-nigh crushed her spirit even amidst that outward show of prosperity and pleasure; that solicitude for her child was wearing out the heart of the mother, trembling for an evil to come, so that she felt little of the brightness in which these, my summer days, flew past.

Autumn and winter came, and hid away my rod and line, swept away all thought of the mill, its flowers, its

Hetty. When spring came again I sought my favourite pools by shorter ways than the mill-stream, and never once recalled the beauty of the old mill. But on a May-day, from the river's bank, I saw many people standing about the little cottage, and, wondering what this might portend, I went hastily to see. Somebody might have been drowned in the mill-stream; something untoward it must certainly be; and the pretty face and flowing curls of the daughter of the mill came vividly before my mind's eye. I asked myself how I could forget her. I chided myself for that all those months I had forgotten her. Then I drew near to the crowd. The furniture of the cottage was being sold off, for Mr. Allan, I was told, "had failed." The auctioneer was in the act of selling a neat little couch bed, and sought to enhance its value by setting forth that it was better than new, never having been slept on save by Mr. Allan's little maiden daughter. It was a sweet little couch, standing in a little closet room to the back of the cottage, the window of which looked up the strath to Benaldie, with its rugged crags and pine-clad summit. There was the man, the auctioneer, shouting out; there was I, in the little room; but the little girl was gone from it. The man's words referring to her, the laugh of the people, seemed frightfully cold-blooded; smote cruelly on my heart. I felt sick and rushed out to the open air. I drank of the water of the mill-lead, and hurried me away.

To me all the world seemed out of joint, because men

were thus allowed to sell that child-couch. How was it? How dared they sell the little girl's bed? It was iniquitous, I cried. "You see," said they who heeded me, "her father was in debt. It was reasonable that whatever things he had should be sold for payment of his debts." But this in no wise satisfied me. Why was the child to suffer for the father's debt? Why was she to be driven from her couch, and the pretty couch sold away in that disgraceful manner for her father's improvidence? They replied, "It is the law." I, petulant, called the law unjust, would not recognise that the surest foundation of social progress was based on it. Long it was before I became reconciled to the law, before I saw reason or justice in it or its application, which makes the innocent suffer with the guilty.

The years of boyhood and youth flew apace. What were the father's speculative follies, the child-daughter's beauty to me? What their fall or their fortune? I forgot them, scarcely recalled them when, as a young man, I wandered down to the mill dell, in the spirit of contemplation that often besets the rustic mind at twenty.

But when, bankrupt and his goods dispersed, Mr. Allan left the pretty cottage, or was driven from it, he sought a home, perhaps a new field in which again to woo fortune, at our county town. In our old-fashioned land rare chance of retrieval is afforded to the man who once succumbs and admits himself to be beaten in the battle of life. The stain of bankruptcy is hard to

whitewash. No doubt, we have amongst us a few instances to the contrary, but of such cases the people never will believe otherwise than that the failure was fenced by fraud. It has passed into the proverb, "the diel's ain, he failed wi' 'a fill han';'" the reference to Satan, I presume, importing the popular belief that when that potentate was heaven-reft, he had amply provided for the indulgence of his special desires. Too often is the bankrupt hopeless as the fiend accursed, eager to do well, eager to rehabilitate his name and home, but sequestered utterly, left to sink without one arm stretched forth to save. Poor Allan found it thus. At the first, he put on his best coat and a bold face, and went into the county market, claiming the acquaintance of rich men he had known, and challenging their dealing. At first his Hetty wore her fine clothes, and her lodging was genteel; but when for months they had gone with scanty food, and there was no money to pay the rent, humbler rooms had to be sought out, and gradually the better clothing disappeared. The bloom left the cheek of the child, the mother's face waxed wanner than before. The father's broken fortune was bitterly manifest. Then he took to wandering on foot over the county, soliciting small orders for tea, of which he carried samples, obtained from a warehouse at the town. He made a few pence by the sale of each pound, which, by a second journey, he delivered to the purchaser.

After a time, for his greater convenience in this

humble and laborious effort for a living, he took a cottage, quite a lowly little cottage in our village, for his home. But by this time his health and spirit were broken as well as his fortunes, and a few brief months transferred him to that narrower home where there is no work or device.

The parish buried him. The widow, unclad in mourning, let herself out to wash and to white-seam, or to do light work for the few who could afford to pay for such work as she could do. The pale face became hard-set and grim as death. But she earned a cake for her child and her, and was no doubt thankful in that she earned it. The child's worn-out clothing and tattered shoes admitted the fact that, in the struggle for life, the body itself is more than raiment. Recalling the mother's pale, thin face among the cottage roses, I should have thought that she, first of all, would have yielded to the hardship of her changed life, should first have found the rest that remaineth for all. I did not know the secret strength of woman, strong ofttimes where man will fail. She fought the fight for her child, till the girl, being sixteen, went from her as nursemaid to the manse of Glenaldie. Then, in her loneliness, she pined and yielded, and—caring no more to struggle—died. She left enough to lay her decently in the earth that wrapped her husband.

Alone in the world, and so young, Hetty Allan's tears fell fast, but it was not of her nature or of her youth to grieve for ever, although at first her grief

was as real as it was apparent. It is good how quickly tears dry on the cheek of youth, the most susceptible. The salt tears that are hard to dry flow from eyes that have looked long on life and are weary, trinkle down cheeks that are furrowed. Sorrows of all sorts rest lightly on the young, and when the fit of weeping is past, the dimples of youth break cheerily into smiles again. Well, well; it is God's way; and would there were less frequent cause for youthful tears.

Privation long continued will not permanently affect young minds. Hunger and rags will not crush the elasticity of youth. If plenty comes at sixteen, many days of semi-fasting gone by count as but a tale that has been told; and how shall the tatters of yesterday be remembered in the pride of the trim dress of to-day? Or if poverty modifies the character of the young, it is sad to reflect that it rarely softens it with a genial benevolence, seldom instils a gentle humility. Too often it induces a hardened selfishness, and a recklessness worse than the prodigality of wealth.

Thus, when Hetty Allan's tears were dry, she came speedily to feel a satisfaction in life. Just as in the first years of her life, so now, she had all the pleasant surrounding of flowers, and trees, and local beauty. The meadows to which she wandered with her nurslings were as green, the sunshine as bright, the summer world as glad as when she knew the mill-stream and was a happy child. But she did not care for them. Her neat print frock, with its two flounced hems to the

skirt, was a much more substantial pleasure. There was no foliage so charming as her own ample brown tresses, which, at usual times hidden away by the cap, badge of her servitude, she would let down by the hedges and by the stream side, to wanton in the summer breeze. No one had told her that she was pretty, but she knew she was. No one had praised her figure, but she was certain she was handsome. The minister, her master, had said "that girl does things in a graceful way;" and Hetty Allan thenceforth felt that she was charming. She remembered her childhood's silks and velvets, and her father's gig. Ah me! poor thing! Is this the style of mind to fit the working girl for a happy journey of life? What would I have? An old head on her young, fair shoulders? Do I grudge her that God-gift to each and all of us in our teens, the belief that we are specially favoured and endowed of Him? Not at all, but I would that her pleasure in herself were not aggravated into pride, and selfishness, and vanity.

Perhaps her master may have seen into the wayward heart of his pretty maiden. He wot not that she had heard his words of praise, but he knew that her heart was lifted up. Therefore when he found her with his little ones he would speak to her of moral beauty and of the nobler grace of humility. "Humility, forsooth! Am come o' as guid fowk as his ain bairns! He canna but own that nane o' them will e'er be sae fair or comely!" she would say when he was gone. The

teaching must indeed be cunningly phrased that will teach humility to the beauty of sixteen. Of course, there was church-going and family worship, and much admirable exposition both of what is commanded and of what is duty. "Nane is gaein' tae dee the noo!" said the weary Hetty, who, having her young head full of things more instant, never could manage to say her catechism on the Sunday evening, when, after tea, the whole household was exercised therein by way of question and answer. She was greatly affected by the songs of Robert Burns, and but lightly esteemed the melodies of Sion. She verified our national proverb, "The nearer the kirk, the farther frae grace."

She was contemptuously attentive to her young charge. She washed and combed them, led them forth and brought them home again, very tolerant of their humours, but never sympathising with their little sorrows, never heartily sharing in their little joys. They never found an entrance to her heart. They were to her but her task. She must attend to them. Beyond that what were the children to her?

One might have fancied that their innocent prattle would have touched her; that her heart, not preoccupied by love of parent or kindred, would greedily have filled itself with that affection to which almost all hearts are open—the love of little children. But she had no tenderness for the children. If she kissed them, as she sometimes did, to secure their more ready submission to her wishes, her kisses were always heartless and cold.

She had no small power of rendering herself agreeable, and this and her appearance and manners secured the high opinion of her mistress, who would have thought it a personal misfortune to lose the services of the girl. The mistress was a woman easy of disposition, who did not care to look under the surface of things. The nursemaid kept herself neat and clean, and so also kept the children, whose dress and equipment reflected on her own appearance. Thus two years went by not unpleasantly. But Hetty did not acknowledge any pleasantness in her service, was not thankful for it, longed earnestly for change. Vanity, and pride of heart, and ease of life did their evil work on her, hardening her heart, giving her wrong notions of her relative importance, and filling her with longings for change.

She knew not what she longed for—perhaps she did not greatly care. She felt the tediousness of the present, and foresaw not the grave functions and hard duties of the life beyond her present. She was weary of plenty and peace, fretful amid comfort, sullen in that little world serene. Yet even her ill-humours sat on her with some grace, and the vague pinings of her nature may have added to the charms of her opening womanhood.

At this time Sarah Gibson came to the manse as housemaid. She was twenty-four years of age, a large and comely woman; not pretty after the manner of Hetty Allan's prettiness, but of that comeliness which comes of good sense and right thought. She had been

long in service, and had long received high wages, being paid nearly twice as much as the little nursery-maid, so that she came attired in excellent gowns, and a superior bonnet, and the nursemaid was pleased to receive her very graciously, and to bestow much commendation on her person and dress. In fact, Hetty made more frank advances, in the way of friendship, towards this housemaid than she had ever done to any human being. "She took tae her a' at aince."

On the first Sunday after Sarah's coming, while she dressed herself for church, Hetty was standing by, and saw, with surprise and admiration, her friend take from her trunk a large brooch to fasten her shawl. "My!" cried Hetty, seizing on it. "It is bigger an' mair heavy than ony o' the mistress's! Is it rale gould? Whaur gat ye it?"

"It is rale, Hetty; but how I got it is my own little secret," Sarah replied, as taking the trinket from the admiring maid, she stuck it in her bosom.

Much Hetty longed and wondered, longed for the day when she should have as fine a brooch, longed and sighed for it during the forenoon which she spent at home with the children; all the time, with all a woman's curiosity, wondering what the secret of the brooch might be.

It was not long until she learned the secret—the gold brooch was a love-offering of Adam Mann, the tall, swarthy foreman at the village smithy. "Ye are gaein' tae be mairried surely," cried Hetty when she

knew it. "Am telt he has a pound a week o' wage. Gin I haed sic a chance, I wadna lang be bairns-maid tae ony brats but ma ain."

"Ah, lassie! dinna be sae rash. There's mair tae be thoucht for than the nursing o' weans." A shade came over the pleasant face of Sarah, as she added, "It's weel for warkmen's wives tae tak' tent they lo'e worth and guidness o' ways, as weel as walth o' wage, if they wad lo'e an' nurse wi' happiness." Hetty guessed why the shadow came to her friend's face, for she had heard that Adam Mann was not always steady. Yet she went on:

"But a pound a week! what a heap it wad dae! An' he's a brave, tall chiel! Gin there's ony beau nigh han' sae guid that ye canna favour, gie me a chance o' him, Sally."

"Wheesht! little girl! Ye ken noucht o' the evil o' sic rashness. Trust mair tae guidness o' hairt than tae broad shouthers, gin ye wish ways o' paice. Mind, I dinna say Adam's hairt's nae worthy."

But the young girl tossed her head. "Little girl, forsooth!" she thought; and she thought, moreover, that wisdom did not go by bulk of body. "Ye may ca' me little, gif ye plaise, Sally; but am nae witless. Guid gear gangs aye i' sma' parcels. Ye shudna counter Adam Mann."

By-and-by, Hetty came to know that her friend loved Adam Mann with a sincere affection, and had promised to wed him if for a year he kept away from

the public-house, and proved himself a man on whom she could rely, proved that his affection for her was stronger than his desire for drink or delight in tipsy songs. Hetty envied her friend. Hetty thought her friend hard-hearted, and told her she was hard-hearted. "This is nae fair trial o' the man," she would say. "It war different gin ye war afore him tae wile him frae mischief." Sarah knew there was some truth in her young friend's words. She loved the man, and at times grew faint-hearted, fearing that the trial to which she was subjecting him might prove too protracted or too severe, and thus she was not displeased when Hetty chid her and argued so.

One thing made Sarah be always gentle with the younger girl—that was that she had no father, or mother, or home. She did not like the girl's lamentation over the fact, so often repeated; nor did her invidious contrast of their conditions always sound pleasantly. "Ye hae yer hame an' yer friens. Ye can aye shift whaur the maist wage is tae be got. Am alane i' the warld. Dae ye think gin I daured face the chance o' being oot o' plaice, I wat bide on here aifter thae brats for twa pounds? I can tell ye nay." ——"Ye can afford tae be saucy, Sally! Ye can condition wi' yer lovar! It mak's little tae ye whether he keeps terms or no! Ye hae yer hame, an' routh o' cladding, an' ye needna care. I wish, I wish I was like ye!"

Envy is akin to hatred, and Hetty Allan in her

heart came near to hate this friend to whom she ostensibly clung so much. "The big, fat face o' her!" she would say to herself. "She haes scarce a towie o' hair! What way, i' the deil's name, can ony man fancy her, an' sae mony bonny queans like me sair waitin' the marcat?" She would let down all her rich brown hair, while she thought so, and sigh for the time when some man, any man, would come wooing her with a pound a week.

Of course, Adam Mann came to the manse to see the woman of his desires. Sarah had, when first she came, frankly told her mistress the position of her affairs—that if for a year the man kept steady and saved his money instead of drinking it, she would place her love and her future comfort in life in his keeping. Her mistress had much commended such prudence, and the lover was free to visit. Thus Hetty Allan met her friend's affianced one.

When first she was with them together she was full of the liveliest curiosity, and gave utterance to it. "I wish ye wad begin ye twa! Am deean tae ken what lik' coortin' may be! It's a chance for me tae learn; an' wha kens, orphan though I be, an' a puir ane, but I may hae practeese o' it some day. Winna ye fa' tae?"

But Sarah Gibson was not demonstrative of her affection. If there was anything in the way of demonstration of it at all, it must have been during those two or three minutes in which Sarah went with her lover from the kitchen door to the garden gate, for Hetty saw

nothing of it at all. Adam Mann used to come in and sit down quietly by the kitchen fire, and there was a cup of tea made for him by the old cook. Sarah gave him as much of her time as she could, but necessarily was absent from him at her work upon occasions. When she did sit by him, their talk was chiefly of the little matters of the village, of their relatives, and things that could not interest them much, and never of their love at all. It was only at rare times that Hetty, having trimmed herself in her best, could slip down from the nursery, with her jeering question, "Whan will ye fa' tae?"

It seemed probable that Sarah would be happy in her quiet love, for Adam stood his probation well, to the no small disgust of Hetty Allan, who would fain have witnessed her friend's disappointment. Yet to that little friend Sarah would often speak with a warm heart of the man's well-doing, and of her satisfaction in prospect of the happiness in store for her. The little friend would declare herself ever so happy therefor, and would hide away all the grudging and the malice that really lay at her heart. Sarah never guessed the evil of the little heart that fed the pinky cheek of her little friend. Thus the days and the nights went by till gloomy winter was at hand.

Who has whispered to Adam Mann, "Ye're a gowk, puir chiel, faithfu' though ye be! Sally does na lo'e ye! Kent ye e'er any true lass lo'e a true man, an' hedge him roon wi' conditions, an' higgle an' haggle

aboot terms for her lo'ein' o' him?" Who said to him, "The cauld, prood lass will hae anither condition for ye yet, if ainee the twal' months' trial is oot?" Who first told Sarah Gibson, after Martinmas, that Adam Mann had spent the term night in song, with good liquor, and with his old cronies? I grieve to say it was the simple, smooth-faced Hetty Allan. She told it to her friend with tears in her bright eyes, and with much appearance of sorrow, while her heart was glad to see the sorrow of her friend.

Her friend did not suspect her, and poured into her ears all the conflict of her fears and her hopes, of her certain love and of her uncertain doubts of her lover. Sarah had by this time come to think the nursemaid was a selfish little thing, but with her good sense and just judgment, she could account for the selfishness of the friendless, orphan girl. It did, however, annoy her to be urged to take Mann in this wise: "Ye are ower het an' comfortable, Sally, or ye wad na mak' sae muckle bargaining at the offer o' a pound a week!"

"Puir young thing!" she answered. "Ye maunna mak' money be the prime thoucht, whaur there be hairts and lives concerned. Dinna lat the glamour o' the siller dazzle een that shud see richtly even whan dazzled wi' love. Am straited masel'. God help me tae see aricht whatna way I shud act toward him! Gin I suffered ma hairt tae guide me, I wad rush tae the lad an' tak' him wi' a' the fauts that I hae tried tae wean him frae." Sarah did not shed many tears,

but I do not doubt that she felt this sorrow at her heart all the sorer because she strove so hard to suppress her tears, and to cover over calmly the wound that rankled in her breast.

Hetty Allan became the confidante and go-between of these two lovers for a time, in the difference which parted them after this transgression of their compact. Then, in the manse shrubbery, in the moonlight, she would meet the repentant Adam, and sorely blame him for his lax life, and urge him to sobriety with much demureness. "Did ye na tell me," asked Adam, "that Sarah ne'er lo'e'ed me? What's the use o' thinking an' aff-pitting? If she lo'es me, let her say 'yea' or 'nay.' Frae ma hairt I wish it 'yea.' If she wad only tak' me i' her ain care, I'd be a true man."

"I doot I was wrang. I think she maun lo'e ye, Adam," Hetty answered. "But ilk lass lo'es i' her ain fashion. Sarah is cauld an' wise, I guess, and her love maun match her natur'. I think she's far wrang, lad, scrimpin' an' stintin' ye. 'Ye maunna dae this, an' ye daurna dae that,' for her! It's an ill fashion o' love, but if ye will drink o' her beer an' nane else's, why, man, ye maun brook the brewing!"

"It's ower bad! tell her that frae me!" he said sulkily.

"Ay, puir chiel!" answered the little maid, and she put her hand upon his arm and turned her pretty face full to his, while the moonlight shone brightly on both. "Ay, puir chiel! Ma ain hairt's wae for sae fine a

chiel gaein' comfortless wi'oot his lass, 'cause he chanced tae meet his friens an' tak' a dram! I telt her it was nae fair play. Ye ken yersel' an it's true love or no."

Adam Mann looked into the upturned face. He had thought this girl, Hetty, a very pretty girl from the first day he saw her. Now, as he chucked her under the chin and said, "Weel, weel; thank ye, lassie, for yer advice an' kindness. It's guid there's as guid as Sally Gibson nae half sae sour on me," he was really thinking, might not this girl, so considerate of his errors, make him a more fitting spouse than the arbitrary Sarah.

"Am feart I'll learn tae coort atween ye twa," said Hetty, demurely hanging down her head. In a minute she was slyly glancing at him again, saying, "I wish I haed a tall, black, brave chiel o' ma ain tae coort me richt. I wadna be sae bad tae him, am sure."

"By God, ye wadna!" said Adam. "I'll see Sally Gibson an' a' her big friens i' the bottomless pit, gin I'll thole their fash!" He seized Hetty Allan in his great arms suddenly and kissed her.

She slapped his face with her soft little hand, while she pouted, "Maybe I winna grudge ye ane kiss, puir chiel! since ye're sae hard pit tae!"

"Tell Sally Gibson that it is past and ower atween us. I'll see ye by-times, again," and away the man stalked in the moonlight.

"I' faith! I'll win him!" said the traitorous Hetty, as she turned to enter the manse.

She did not give Mann's message to Sarah Gibson as it was given to her; nor did she tell the truth about that meeting at all. It sufficed to say, with a tossing of her head, "Sally, Sally! I'll ne'er gang oot tae meet that black chiel o' yours mae mair! I'll nae stan' bein' kissit an' claspit for ye or nane! But believe me, gin ye dinna gae an' hug him yersel', he'll sune fin' anither tae suit his turn." What did it matter to Hetty that quiet tears were trinkling down the woman's cheeks. "Ye're prood, an' cauld, an' wise by a' I e'er heerd tell o'! Nae richt man cu'd thole sic airs, I tell ye. If ye want him gang till him, or I wat he'll nae wait lang. But he's nae tae be kissing o' me!"

With cunning falsehood and treacherous deceit, she put between two hearts that long had been fondly affected each to the other; with cunning flattery and treacherous enticements, Hetty Allan lured this man with his ample wage. With caution and in secret she did it, so that Sally, weeping at her side, did not know of her treachery, until the summer term came round, and Hetty gave up her place, to the wonder of the inmates of the manse, to whom she would assign no reason. But the wonder was dissipated by the rumour which followed quickly, to astound at least one heart—Hetty was to marry the smith.

CHAPTER II.

HETTY ALLAN had done wrong. I do not say she went unpunished, but perhaps her punishment bore no relation to her wrong-doing. Adam Mann was plighted to Hetty's friend, and Hetty knew the sincerity of her friend's affection for him, and the earnest desire of that friend's heart to make him worthy of the rich affection which she longed exceedingly to bestow upon him. She knew, too, the weak points of the man, his lack of resolution, his tendency to drink to excess, his need of the quiet strength which such a woman as Sarah Gibson could give him. Yet, in very selfishness and wickedness, Hetty had estranged him from that friend, had wiled the man from his espousals, had charmed him with wicked, sportive graces, and by little things that inflamed him, until he forgot his vows to Sally—until, abjuring truth and honesty and right feeling, he turned to her, Hetty, and perjured himself with protestations that he loved only her.

It would be unjust if I did not tell you that, without doubt, Hetty Allan bore for the blacksmith quite as much of true love as there is in ordinary cases.

Yet it may have been that her innate selfishness had quite as much to do with her marriage as love, her hatred of the nurse-maid's cap and life quite as much as feeling of triumph, the restless longing for change quite as much as natural promptings. Indeed, a great many

things go to make up the phase of mind that seeks matrimony. Anyhow, thus it was. She married the blacksmith, with his wage of a pound a week, and heeded not the groan or the curse of poor Sally Gibson.

There was not much outward beauty to encircle her home. It was just one of the cottages on the south side of the main street, close to the smithy yard. It comprised but two rooms, and these were but scantily furnished with things of deal; for Mann, notwithstanding his excellent wage, had not saved money. And this should have made a prudent woman pause before binding herself to such a one for life. It denoted that Adam Mann did not aim at rising out of the rank of journeyman, had not the ambition to become a master, to which end he must measure his means, and husband his shillings, for a blacksmith needs a twenty-pound note at least to start him in his trade. Then, again, if a bachelor could not save from a pound, how should it suffice for wife and weans?

Of course the man had sworn that he would drink no more, that now he had a little wife he should stay at home, or stroll about with her, and pet her and nurse her, and be with her as happy as the nights were long. Does it corroborate such oaths that she is there to receive them? Perhaps she did fremble—not a little—at the first.

But thus it was. He kept his vows, did come home to all his meals and to supper with rigorous punctuality,

that grudged even to earn extra wages by over-work, because he loved not the forge so much as his "dawty," loved not the forge at all compared with the summer evening air, the mill-stream path, the tangled copses of the river bank, and the brightness of his Hetty's eyes in the evening sun. There was no intoxication like this —the subtle pleasure imparted by a lively woman, full of love's enticements, which jumbled heart and brain of him so that he must dance after her. He needed no stimulants now, would have none save the moderate dram that she kissed at supper-time and proffered for his drinking, before they strolled forth arm-in-arm.

And she, she shut out every thought of the course by which she had compassed and acquired her happiness, shut her heart against all thoughts of her unhappy friend, and abandoned herself to the present joy. Being thus contented and full of pleasure, she was not so scrupulous as to cleanliness in her home, not so careful of appearances within doors as you might have expected of her. Ease of mind and fulness of pleasure dispose to folding of the arms, and to contentment with boards unscoured. What of that? By the supper hour she was decorated for going abroad, with the neatness and the gracefulness that only your lively, fine girls can display; while her ample curls, now changed from the flaxen of childhood to light brown, flowed in glistening mazes over her shoulders, sometimes streamed out behind in bewildering and bewildered trail in the evening breeze. Fresh-married

love like this is very joyous, and long retains its freshness, its subjects being so young and vigorous, and sprightly.

It was rumoured at midsummer that John Howden, a farmer well to do, was about to marry Sally Gibson. In this case, as in many, rumour was false; but the matter gravely disturbed the peace of our newly-married pair. Adam Mann was disturbed. He could not conceal from himself the sound character and high integrity of the girl he so long had wooed. He had not so utterly lost sight of her worth and value that he could learn unmoved that another man was to win the prize which was for so long his great object. It vexed him to a degree that was unreasonable. Nay, what was worse, he let his little wife know somewhat of the commotion that was within his heart.

She cried, poor little innocent thing! "Why did ye tak' a puir wee thing lik' me? I aye feart that ye lo'e'd her best, an' that it was nae but in spite ye soucht me! Whate'er shall I dae!" she cried, and so on. Adam called her a little fool, but next instant he was fondling her, protesting the reality of his affection, which, well you may believe it, had no substantial foundation.

Hetty dried her tears, when thus her tall husband chided and fondled her; but she could not conceal from herself that her hold of the man's heart was not very strong, and that there might be some lack of happiness even with a husband who earned a pound a week. Her

love for him was not very tender, but her knowledge of him taught her this—she must bind him to her by love, or something akin to love, if the comfort she valued so much was to be securely hers.

She was too inexperienced to know how much the cleanliness and neatness of home might aid her efforts to bind her husband to her. She thought the great point was to adorn her person, and to dazzle him with her charms. Fortunately his standard of home comfort was not high, and he was proud of his pretty little Hetty. What would he have? he asked himself. Was not the little one his wife, his choice, "his lot?" Two wives he could not have; and therefore it were best to forget all about Sarah and his old love. He might have done more wisely. Heigho! who could tell? So Adam Mann washed his grimy face, and took his poor little girl-wife on his knee, and much of the trouble was past for the time. The little wife knew well the winning way of nestling into his great bosom, and making him feel how utterly and helplessly she depended upon him. Then out into the summer evening they would stray together; and thus they toyed and becked, and walked out all the evenings till the darkness fell early, and still they toyed and becked, and her sprightly ways bound the man to his home. The winter also rolled away; and then, first real joy of womanhood, beside which life has no equal, placid pleasure, when the pang is past, she bore a son to her husband, and called the babe by the father's name. Alas, that

so many fathers, going toilsome along life, hardened by privation and rough work, know not and share not that tender, that delicious joy of their wives; feel gruffly thankful that the wean has come, and that wife will soon be about again; know they must "keep" the bairn, and feel and know no more.

Adam Mann, the father, was of nature rough, and toil had gradually been hardening him, since the day when, affianced to Hetty Allan, his wages had become scrimp for the objects they had to cover. Yet the coming of this baby pleased him, touched him. In fact, the man who can hold in his arms the swaddled younker of a day, and say "this is mine," without emotion, is other and worse than human. Still, even when thus a new pleasure is brought to you, must you not miss the old ones? If protracted puerperal illness detains your partner from household duties, is there not in that case some reason to fret? Hetty was long of recovering. Dull weeks passed and left her still feeble and feverish. Her husband had his food irregularly. His sleep was disturbed and broken. Her wreathed becks and smiles were vanished, and her capacity to wile him was put out of joint, so that when she got on foot again, they were not as before; and she, who had but indifferent notions of home tidiness in the pleasures of her honeymoon, weighted by her baby, became sluttish in her ways. Women suffer much, and festering nipples are enough to break down the firmest spirit, to crush out the most resolute desires for regularity, the most

anxious resolves to satisfy a husband's taste. The husband now solaced himself, for the lack of his spouse's more pleasant ministrations, with a dram at the public-house.

At this time it was that M'Combie, the master smith, fell ill, and his sickness was even unto death, but he lingered awhile, and, for the nonce, the journeyman became master of the business. The man's heart was stirred within him by this near approach to independence. Was it not a thing that might in other circumstances have been, that he should have been able to acquire this business? That he was not, did not rouse him so much to effort and resolution in the future as move him greatly to fretfulness. Thus, while he, in discomfort, took his hasty meals, he would rail at fate and against himself. If it were not for this act of folly bypast, and for that other chance foregone; if, in fine, he had been other than he was, he might have mastered this situation; and so he fretted and asked what he had got in exchange. Then came the first words of direct unpleasantness between his wife and him, when the wife, enfeebled and irritable, said, "Yes, I ken it is my faut. If ye war free, ye might git a lass wi' siller; if ye e'en haed gat Sally Gibson, ye might hae managed tae hae the smuddy wi' her! If it war na for the wean, I cud wish I war deed!"

Under thatched roofs and in narrow rooms, there is quite as much hazard of unpleasant rubbing and jarring of souls, as in loftier mansions; and, although ill

words spoken may be less seriously regarded, there is less perception of the folly of persistence in the strife. The tart word prompts to unkind response, and wisdom, to restrain the unruly tongue, rarely rules the inmates of those dwellings. Thus the husband counted himself aggrieved, the wife deemed herself injured, and sullenness reigned where smiles were wont to shine.

Of course, it was wholly out of Mann's power to purchase the business of M'Combie deceased, and it was very doubtful whether the young man, who would acquire it, would need the service of the highly paid foreman. He probably would deem himself amply equal to perform all the work of higher skill and stouter effort, that came to the village smithy. In that case, what should Adam Mann do? What should become of him and his? Yet the prospect of evil imminent did not sweeten their tempers, or soften their hearts; did not draw them closer to each other, knit and weld their souls into one, so that they should the better bear it. For a wrongous, perverse spirit was growing, had already grown up in the wife. A sullen indifference to the wife's feelings had set hard upon the husband. Poor life is worn out in broils before man comes to know the merits of concession, and to learn that, life to be enjoyed, there must be ever recurrent compromises. A little blinking at each other's petulance, a little gentleness with each other, where and when each felt the weight of his or her burden, a little on their lips of the love which certainly was alive at their hearts, and

this pair, with all their causes of concern, might have been not unhappy.

There was reason for the husband's apprehension that his services might be dispensed with, but yet the worst did not fall out. At the Whitsunday term the business was taken by a young man, strong enough to work. He said that a foreman was not necessary for him, he would be his own foreman, but he was willing to give fifteen shillings a week for the service of a journeyman. Mann might stay on if he chose to take that; and Mann, bound to the spot by wife and child, having also his house engaged for another year, and having no certainty of employment elsewhere, grinned and swore, and stayed. One fourth part off their little income was not a fact to sweeten life. As often happens, there being less to expend, less care and judgment marked the expenditure of it.

And now that summer was come once more, the paths and copses, that a year ago had seen this happy pair, saw them not again. There was the baby to nurse of evenings, to wash and put to bed, and much of the household work to be done when baby was finally secured in its cradle. When else could the clothes-washing be done, for instance? When, the daily supply of water fetched from the well? Foolishly, Hetty strove to make her husband feel how hard she was put to it, that thus it was at late hours and in his presence she must work. This only worried him and drove him out.

"What can't be cured must be endured," is proverbial philosophy of the lowest type. So, time, which did not teach this pair to sweeten life, taught them stolidly to endure it, making, at length, no great moan in enduring. The husband wrought out his hours of work, got his wages, gave barely enough of them to his wife for the week's supplies, came home at meal hours and took his food, because hunger would seek him whether he would or would not, and he must eat; came home at night, without craving for home pleasures, came mainly because of supper and that he must sleep.

And she—was it possible that the flower-queen of the old mill garden, the pretty sprite of my boy dreams, she of the sweet blue eyes and flowing, flaxen curls, could have, under any circumstances, matured into the untidy, unkempt woman, whom I passed daily seated on the door step, dandling her baby or suckling it? Shyly I passed her by, and felt very humble as I did it. Humble, why? Humble because in me lie none of the springs and causes that have made me what I am; because I am what I am through causes of which I am but the poor dependent, having in myself nought whereof to boast. Did I despise her? Nay, full as erst my heart was of loving interest for the child, now as full was it of sadness for the sunken woman.

Yet, even in these abject days, there was about her something which distinguished her from the ordinary peasant women who like her and with her sat in the doors. Depend upon it, if either body or spirit of a human

creature be embued with any genuine grace, it is not in the power of circumstances utterly to eliminate it. In poverty and rags vestiges of it will still present themselves, faintly denoting what the poor soul might have been, ever giving to the observer more or less of hope that the dissicated grace may bud anew.

The stream of life rolled on, dull and dirty, until in the third year of their wedlock, their second child was born, a tiny little girl-child, with flaxen hair locks even at the birth, a sweet little babe that scarcely puled at all. And on this occasion the mother suffered greatly, as before, being many days before she was on foot again; but she was very joyous in the little girl. Here was an odd thing that whereas she now had two little ones to tend, she was moved to keep this baby's white things white and pure, and felt a craving to adorn it which she had not felt for her first. Could "the wee facie" and "the lintwhite locks" of the infant be stirring the depths of her woman nature, with hidden memories of her own early childhood, thus mingling solicitude with maternal love?

In this her second illness, her husband became more neglectful of his home than ever before. It was true that in his home there was little to attract him. Untidy, unswept, unclean, with a puling wife and screeching weans, and reproachful thoughts raised up by each want unsupplied, it repelled him well nigh wholly. He slunk into it to his meals; came in late to lie down

without one loving word for the little ones whose helpless lives were bound up with his. He was not wholly bad. He often cursed himself for his irregularities. But he was weak of resolution, and prone to fall into temptation. If his little wife had only been as winsome as in the first year of their wedded life; if he had only been prosperous, I do not doubt that he would have been a better and more home-loving man.

Now, in her lonely moments, her frequent hungry days, while she tried to still the cry of her firstborn for the food which she had not to give him, now was the time when Hetty came to learn, through bitter experience, how right it was in Sarah Gibson to have desired assurance of this man before she wedded him. Miserable schemer! she had sacrificed the peace and plenty of her days of service, the claims of truth and friendship, nay, more, her young life also, for such an end as this! It was only the bairns, "the wee bit lass bairn" especially, that kept her mouth closed and held her from crying out about her misery. It was a hopeful symptom that, while in her wretchedness she looked into the baby's face, she thought she could bear all, if only she knew that the baby's father loved her—cared for her at all. Did this first unselfish yearning come from her tenderness for the infant?

In her weakness, she could scarcely make an effort to wile the man back to her, to her and to some sense of his duty to his home. He did not take kindly to "his dochter." His little boy engaged all the favour

he had to bestow upon his offspring. But when she had regained some little strength after her confinement, and strength came to her very slowly, and set herself to tidy up the house, she smiled her poor, watery smiles into her erring husband's face, she suppressed every symptom of reproach, and humbled herself in gentle ways before him. The great, rough man, facile ever, was caught once more by her efforts, which were effectual to make him speak with frankness at his fireside, to lay down a few more shillings of his wages than before, to come home a little earlier at night, but ineffectual to lure him wholly from the tavern bar—curse of many homes like his.

Even this partial success was valued greatly by the pining mother, pining for the love of her husband so much estranged—pining for the weal of her bairns sacrificed through their father's erring ways. Denied the love she sought from him, or at best receiving but a delusive semblance of it, she turned her heart warmly to her little ones, most warmly to her baby-girl, half in hope, half in despair, and with eyes wholly blinded with the grief which she did not dare to let her husband see.

As the baby grew, the mother grew in care of it, in pride of it. "Was there e'er sae dainty a bit lassay? Was there e'er sae curly a pow, sae bonnie a mou'?" Her heart cleaved to the bairn. Nor was the first-born the worse for this. He shared fully in the new-born zeal for clean clothes, fully in the large tenderness that had come to the mother. He

toddled about, poor little man! but mother had still a knee and an arm for him. It is hard to note baby features, but I think the little girl was like the miller's Hetty. Was it not possible for God to have endowed us with perpetual youth, to have crowned us aye and ever with youth's beauty, and curls, and innocence? Ah, well! Its innocence alone would go largely to meet what I desiderate, would leave us possessed of youth's essential charm; and God has framed us so that each for himself and herself can do somewhat to preserve through life the simplicity and purity of heart and way, of which is the kingdom of Heaven.

The kingdom of Heaven! Is God so exacting that He will take unto Himself whatsoever is pure and lovely? That he will filch from mankind what most He commands them to prize? God takes nothing but what is His, either justly forfeited to him by breach of His law, or, in accord with His law, ripe to be received of Him. But what signifies the exposition of the law to the mother who bewails her babe? Will she mourn the less that her babe died by the law? Abate her sorrow because the Law-giver is just? Nay, sorrow has no argument with reason. Wisdom avails little to seal up tears.

And there was weeping and wailing in the cottage of Adam Mann, for after one brief night of coughing and fretting, and symptoms of baby-pain, in the morning, the child-girl lay dead in their arms. Dr. Blake told me it died of pneumonia. What mattered the name of the

disease? I lose patience when doctors give mysterious names to what is simply—death. As if knowledge of its special character was any alleviation of the calamity.

The mother, stunned and frightened, for it came unexpectedly, would not believe the little one was dead. "She was only sleeping," she said, laughing them to scorn. "It is warm and peaceful. 'Twill be better when it wakes." And she happed her child with an extra shawlet and pressed it to her bosom, if, mayhap, it might awake and suck. But hour after hour its peace was unbroken, strange contrast to its night of fretfulness. Doubting, still unbelieving, she would feel it that it was warm, and again she pressed it to her bosom and smiled, for warm it was. Hour after hour she watched and nursed it, until at noon the babe was cold in death; and then the mother felt and wept, as only one in bitterness for a first dead babe may feel and weep. With difficulty the neighbours got it from her, that they might dress it for the burying.

Long she sat silently with her head drooped on her hands staring into the fire, while the gossips moved about and talked in every-day tones of the little corpse, and spoke the every-day cold comfort of such philosophy as "Nane kens what we rear up our weans tae," "Ainee dool wi' deith—nae risk o' live-long sorrow." She answered not, spoke not till the last was gone, indignant at her silence. Then, with a loud cry, she threw herself on her knees beside the bed where the tiny dead one lay, and cried aloud to God. It may have been that

death, come suddenly near to her, had touched her eyes so that she saw the true issues of life; that, in her affright, the pitiful past was distorted into guilty hideousness, and the unknown future seemed black with a judgment to come. Who can say how it was? But a sword had pierced through her poor soul, convincing and convicting her of sin before Heaven and against her neighbour, and in very horror she cried. Her first-born came to her, crying in loud accord, but in her soul's distress she put him aside, could not speak to him one word to soothe him; while loudly, almost in delirious broken words, she confessed her many and grievous iniquities, and cried for pardon. So the boy sat down on the dusty floor and howled.

Her husband came home to find her thus on her knees, his boy bewailing himself, his fire extinguished. Feeling in his own rough way the grief that had come to them, he was softened by his wife's great sorrow, although he did not understand it. So he stilled the boy, and raised his spouse and would comfort her. But she would not be comforted, declared herself loathesome before God and among men, withdrew herself from his embrace, to cry aloud of her lost condition, of her sins and trespasses which had been visited upon her child; and again she threw herself on her knees to entreat the mercy of Heaven. Poor Mann was bewildered.

They buried her baby from her; but her soul found no peace, for the abiding certainty of God's displeasure, which robbed all light of pleasantness, clothed all the

night with horror. She could eat barely and without zest a little morsel such as preserved her life. She slept scarcely at all. Ever and anon she was upon her knees, acknowledging her transgressions, having her sins ever before her; crying, oh, how earnestly! for forgiveness, entreating forgiveness even while mechanically she strove to do the work of her little home. They who heard her were awed by her broken confessions, softened by the woeful sense of sinfulness, moved to tears by her soul-strained cry for pardon. They brought good men to her, who spoke softly of the everlasting love, of the ever-pardoning love of God, of the all-sufficing atonement of the Saviour. Like sweet music it sounded to her ears, but it abode not with her. She knew it all, but felt not there was any portion of love or atoning grace for her; and her soul's distress increased day by day, for no message of peace came to her. For many weeks thus it was with her. Reason feebly sustained a conflict with conviction of sin, while the light of her eyes became spectral, her form wasted, and her health declined.

Week after week did this deep conviction of sin abide upon her, crush her with cruel grinding to the dust. They said that her sins were but the ordinary common errings of life, they would extenuate them as little things which God could not seriously regard. But she struck them with awe when, with hollow voice, she answered that the least transgression merited everlasting punishment, while of sinners she claimed to be the

chief. Literally, she laid her hand on her mouth and her mouth in the dust, and, in her soul's bitter anguish, cried aloud, "Unclean, unclean! God be merciful to me a sinner;" did it many times a day. At length so weak she was that her trembling limbs could not support her, and she was laid down, and husband and neighbours watched her, waiting for the dread hour when body and mind should be worn out.

But just when hope was gone and darkness and weakness as of death environed her, a sudden light shot to her brain, a sudden hope to her heart, a sudden strength and joy and peace to her soul. She oped her eyes, and proclaimed, "My grace is sufficient for thee: My strength is perfected in weakness." She said it over and over again, uncertain of accent at the first, as if not fully realising that the grace and the sufficiency were for her; but the weakness, after many days of faltering, was perfected in strength. An ineffable feeling of peace and love possessed and warmed her. Then a new song was put into her mouth to magnify the Lord and His anointed, for, for her—yes, her—had wondrous things been done, and all the mercy of God, and all the love and sufficiency of His Son were as for her alone.

Once and again in cases other than this I have met the same phenomenon, and simply, briefly record it. I offer no explanation, venture not to dogmatise. I pass on to tell you that her convalescence was protracted, for her body was greatly enfeebled; but it was progressive, until at the end—it was of many months—she was able

again to greet her husband at the fireside. Many things were changed with her. Care for her home and love for her child and husband were sacred duties laid upon her by the Father of all. Therefore, there was no more sitting in untidiness on doorsteps, but all that was found by her hand to do must be done with diligence, as not for time but for eternity. Very rigorous with herself and soul-searching at the first she was, very tender of conscience, and very greatly fearful of sharing the sins of the world. Her whole relations to life were changed; her husband and her boy had souls precious in her sight; life for them and for her was but a passage to eternity, and she endured as seeing things invisible.

She had much to endure. When the baby lay dead, and its mother was "lik' ane distrackit," at the first, Adam Mann, moved, no doubt, by the solemnity of the circumstances, behaved himself conformably to decency. But when, week after week, she cried out of her sin, and of herself as lost, and of a coming judgment, fear and dislike of his home came upon him; he would scarcely venture into the house to eat his meals; he was generally stupefied with drink before he came home at night to lie down, apart from her, with his boy.

But when her peculiar "experience" had worn her down so that both life and reason seemed about to be finally overthrown, then the neighbour women, who, in their rough ways, nursed and attended to her, set upon the husband whose conduct, they thought, was

sorely aggravating the poor wife's trouble. They sought him in his accustomed haunt, the inn, and with many opprobrious words compelled him to "gang hame, whaur his puir bit lass o' a wife lay deean', dementit for her ain sowl an' his, that scairce was warth being thoucht o'." They fetched him to the darkened, miserable dwelling, and to the presence of his wife. She, poor troubled thing, was too low and too engrossed by the fears and terrors of her soul to have any pleasure in his coming, or, because he came, to cease the sore cries and prayers that welled forth from her affrighted spirit. Mann sat down at his chimney side, and smoked in silence, confounded and alarmed. He did not again desert his home until she was smiling in the joy of that inexplicable peace that came to her, and speaking greatly of the divine love that had delivered her from all her fears.

It was a sore thing for her, and retarded her convalescence greatly, that her husband would still go straying, and would think of God and a life to come not at all; all the sorer for her because she, not unjustly, deemed herself a cause of his many aberrations. If she spoke to him of the things not seen, he either heard her in stolid silence, or bluntly stopped her, saying, "The fash o' this life is enuch tae thole i' time." It was good that he did not wholly flee from what must have been extremely distasteful to him.

How she longed "tae win him" now, to win him for herself and God. She did not forget the baseness and

selfishness of the spirit in which she first sought to win him. Daily, every hour of the day, she spoke of it to Him who heareth in secret, to whom went the continual desire of her heart that the soul of her husband might be given to her. She had her times of sorrow when it seemed that for this she longed and prayed in vain; but, gradually, her earnestness, her patience, her gentleness won him, so that despite himself he was drawn after her, to take gently her prayers outcried, her many-sided views of duty, to kneel with her at the footstool of God, morning and night, first listening to her, but by-and-by, at her entreaty, leading the devotions as the household's head. And when health was re-established and peace assured to her, she could welcome him home with smiles that he thought little else than angelic, that had more influence on him and on his heart, far more, than the becks and wiles which in their early days of matrimony his young wife used so gracefully to cast to him. He would not for life have grieved her.

All this occurred while still the pulse of life in her was young and strong—before Hetty Mann was twenty-two, and although the home was thus filled with the love of Heaven and Heaven's own peace, the impulses, the just ends of life were not obscured or lost sight of. Indeed, after a time these ends and aims were better seen, more reasonably followed. What had before seemed matters of choice, became matters of duty. Careful management, studious provision were the laws

of home life, to be observed and to have their reward. Often doubt and sorrow and trial encompassed her, but she faintly persevered, having respect unto the recompense. You may see the reward somewhat in this case, for Mrs. Mann is still living. West from the smithy yard, beyond its area encumbered by cart-wheels, new and old, the boxes and frames of carts in all stages of progress or decay, old boilers past clouting, ploughs, harrows, and scraps of old iron innumerable, stands the smith's cottage. It has a willow-tree, wide-branched and leafy, near to the door; and roses and geraniums, and honeysuckle give colour and comfort to its little front garden. Within you will find the cosiest couple, the happiest couple in the world. Ten chances to one you will find the big Bible open on the ben-room table, where just a little ago it was read by Mrs. Mann. She is still not an old woman, and, indeed, she looks younger than her years, but quieted and composed of countenance, with sweet serenity and gentle grace marking her as a peculiar woman. Her second son is his father's foreman. Her first-born is Glenaldie's present minister. The kirkyard lies close to the manse, her son's abode, and there Mrs. Mann may often be seen musing beside a little child-grave, where stands a stone marked simply "Hetty Mann, a baby." The stone was set there with Adam Mann's first savings. The spot has no bitterness now for the baby's mother, much of whose old heart and nature may be said to have been buried there.

"QUEER JEAN."

CHAPTER I.

THERE are those to whom it is inconceivable that the qualities which most adorn and elevate human nature should be sometimes found, in rare development, among squalid beings whose days are spent in toil, whose homes and persons are dirty, whose food is coarse and scant, and whose habits must too often to the decently nurtured be matter of offence, if not of reprobation. Such persons know nothing of the poor except what in casual glimpses of them meets the eye, and their feeling, if mistaken, must be admitted to be natural. Mistaken, however, it is. Noble acts and the feeling which inspires them can never be common among the poor; they are uncommon enough among the rich. But as bigotry, in its highest-handed and cruellest day, evolved the noblest heroism, so poverty, here and there, when ruling hardest, touches bruised hearts with tenderest emotion, quickens poor souls with keenest hopes and fears, evokes the noblest self-devotion, and inspires a magnanimity such as you or I dare

not pretend to, even such as doeth all it can, giveth all it hath. Amid its misery, shame, and sin, there are thus to be found graces lovely as humanity may exhibit. If its victims are many, its heroes are not few. Sometimes victim and hero are blended in one poor sinning, suffering, self-sacrificing, lovable soul.

See here, in our back street, is Jean Campbell, seated in her door in the evening sun, with children beside her—two. She is a common-place woman for the eye to rest on, untidy, as women of her class generally are; as tanned and yellowed by sun-glare and dirt as they, with face not much expressive of either thought or feeling—just like the faces that lowly labour and uncomplaining suffering have given to her common sisters. Perhaps, when she turns her eyes to you, you may see in them something more than common. Hard work and sunshine and sorrow may dim the eye, but cannot utterly quench its light, save by its total extinction in the darkness of death. And poor Jean's shines to you with a lambent light, feeble, doubtless, but still mingling fire with its bashfulness; a fitful, flickering light, changing from beams distinct that tell of courage and strength to dare much, to watery gleams that acknowledge suffering for conscious wrong.

Her poor tale, it must be confessed, has in it somewhat of sadness and sin, but it has still more of humble self-sacrifice. Shall I shock you if I tell of sin? What, although it has been washed with many tears, purged with dire suffering and humiliation?

Let it not be so. Let not pure hearts told of wrong and shame, abounding in earth's lowly places, be hardened and sealed up. Nay, learning thus that the plaint of the poor sinner is rising continually from the dingy surface of earth to the ear of the God of all life, rather believe ye, whom He has enlightened and blessed with many blessings, it is His will that pure hearts sympathise with the poor erring ones, that ready arms be stretched forth to succour—perhaps to save; that, doing thus, is most to be like Him.

Well, who is or was she? Be sure that, however she has erred and gone astray, this poor sheep had at first its homefold; that a mother's heart yearned over her with more or less of a mother's special joy, when the dawn of her poor life first flushed in its crimson pain; that a mother tenderly fondled her while yet her life lay in the mother's breast, and exulted over the toddling wee thing when first it tottered at her knee. Yes, nature is very bountiful, giving the humblest of us the treasures of a mother's love. But I will not bore you. I will tell my tale.

Her birth, although lowly, was not inauspicious. She was the daughter of old Campbell, "the pensioner," who dwelt on the south side of the village main street, hard by where it opens out into the Square. I remember him well, with his thin hair iron grey, his erect, spare figure, and his old trousers of regimental tartan. He was a native of the village, had married while in the service a Scotch woman,

but a stranger to our neighbourhood, and his pension was thirteenpence a day. A great matter was the pension, making him somewhat independent, giving him quite the appearance of a man with a competency in the eyes of our labouring people. But, as he had a wife and two children, he was fain to eke out his income by work, binding sheaves and helping the ingathering of the grain in autumn, wielding the thudding flail in winter and spring, a keen scythe at hay harvest. When not thus occupied, he frequented the river bank with the wily fly or deadlier bait to lure the stream trout. A peaceable, sober man he was, seemingly of even temper, orderly, regular in his pew in the parish church with his children and with their mother, who reflected his ways and manners in her neat person and her tidy home. It was, indeed, rumoured, apparently on the authority of those who knew him in days long gone by, that his youth had been marked by lawless irregularities, culminating in a poaching affair and a spree; after which he disappeared from the village, and enlisted. If this was true, no doubt years of discipline had had effect, and broken him into the order-keeping man I knew.

As I have said, he had two children, of whom the elder was this Jean Campbell, the younger a boy some fifteen months her junior. They were sprightly children, not pretty, as I think, but with keen faces, and dark brown eyes, that flashed out inward restlessness, such eyes as it disturbs me to look into, so full are they

of wayward light and unrest. On summer evenings these children were to be seen together, tidily and cleanly clothed, in the barefooted group that skipped, or in the silent ring that played at drop the kerchief, or that, jocund, danced "round by jing-go-ring." Indeed, they were never apart; for the girl, as senior, carefully, steadfastly, watched over "the boy," dusting his clothes when he fell in the dusty way, soothing him when he came by more serious mishap, satisfying his desires with the largest "pieces"—in all things yielding to him. Thus they had their years of schooling together, and how happy are homes in the children's school-days, when, resonant with the children's glee, they satisfy all the desires of the hearts that know not, have not dreamed of roaming. In those peaceful, sunny days it was that the old soldier, "stinting back and belly," as he said himself, saved up the twenty odd pounds that made the cottage he lived in his own, and made him, more than before, a man regarded of his neighbours.

But as the children grew up, the veteran's shoulders began to curve and his chest to sink, and a cough set upon him in the mornings. No longer did he grasp the scythe with the eager strength of former days; the flail struck listlessly when he held it. Not that he was a very old man. Other causes than age may stoop the back and relax the muscles; but come it whence it might, there was the fact, that now he was not fit for the occasional labour needed to make his

pension equivalent to comfort. What remedy was there save that the girl of seventeen should go into the corn-rig with her sickle? that at eighteen, like her compeers, she should be enrolled as a regularly hired worker? Indeed, the father did not prompt her thus to seek constant labour. She had another motive. The father had proposed that Ned, his son, should bethink him of a trade, and the lad had peremptorily refused. He would not be a tradesman. He had left school, and, following the paternal tastes, had taken to angling. His ambition was to be a gamekeeper. Meantime he was willing to enact the gillie, or message-boy, or stable-boy — to do anything but steady work. If they thwarted him, he would follow his father's steps and would list. And father and mother set so much store on this only son, that they were silent when thus he threatened. They had great horror at thought of his "going for a sodger." Jean, too, fondly, foolishly regarded the youth, preferring him still in all things, just as she did long ago when he would quarrel about the oat-cake. So they temporised, and meantime he fished and roamed about, and that he might be more free to roam, that the burden of feeding and clothing him might bear less heavily upon the old folk, Jean became a field hand. Working nigh to the village, however, her father's house was still her home. Thither she brought her allowances of meal and other food-stuffs, great helps to the household economy; thither also in due

time she brought her wages, stinting herself in the matter of clothing that their Ned might have better boots and garments.

Without the counsel or knowledge of his parents, the wayward lad became an habitual frequenter of the stables of the village inn. There, if he picked up a traveller's sixpence, he learned to win the plaudits of the stablemen by devoting the coin to drink, a long step towards the commencement of an improvident life. At length, in his eighteenth year, in the autumn, when there was a demand for horses and carriages at shooting-quarters, he engaged himself to attend to a horse and dog-cart, hired out to the shooting-party at Heathcote of Howe.

Having thus engaged himself, his sense of propriety made a coachman's topcoat indispensably necessary for him, that not only might he be comfortable, but that he might bear the outward aspect and dignity of a coachman. It would cost fully three pounds. He stated his need to his mother,—she must provide this gorgeous garment for him,—and the mother stated the case to her husband. The old pensioner had no money, and would find none for the purpose. Indeed he had no favour for his son's vocation. Ned would pay it back when he got his wages, the mother urged, but the veteran was not to be moved. "Let him win his fee first," said he. "Syn he'll hae plaisure in the spendin' o' it."

Then the lad turned to his sister, when she came

from her day's work. She must help him in his fancied strait, he knew she would. And she was fain to help him, fain in the same spirit that since her childhood had prompted her to prefer him in everything. But she had no money; and how was she to help him? "Winna ye try tae git the marchan' tae mark it?" he entreated; and she did try. The merchant would trust her if only she signed a line to her master for payment of the price at Martinmas term. She would do anything to satisfy the want of this brother, who stood by her saying, "I'll gie ye, Jean, the money whene'er I git ma ain paey." So the merchant wrote the order, and the girl signed it, and the youth got the coveted drab overcoat, and went forth to the stables "as became a coachman," and in due time went with his horse and dog-cart to Heathcote, elated and vain. But the father grumbled, and the mother complained of this deed of their daughter, which spent her little earnings before they were won.

In a few days, however, the lad came into the village, driving his smart trap, and accompanied by the gamekeeper, and charged with the disbursement of several pounds in purchases for his masters. With the keeper he called at his father's cottage. He looked so smart and "brave," and the old man had so much talk with the keeper on the subject of fly-hooks and what not, that he forgot his antipathy to Ned's present calling. He sent out Mrs. Campbell with sixpence and with a bottle "to bring in a dram," to treat the son

and his friend. "Wha kens but Ned may rise in the way he wishes tae! He must begin low like ither lads, if he be tae climb," said the parents, fondly setting their hearts to hope the best for the lad they loved.

The two shooting months passed, and the lad returned to his home with his four pounds of wages, but he gave no part of them to sister or parents. He needs must have gayer clothing—tight kerseymere corded trousers, and the like. He must also have a fishing-rod and tackle of his own. Yet did not the sister complain, did not wound him by reference to his broken promise, but went on her way of dull and daily toil, although now the whole balance of the money wage which her half-year's labour would yield her was only to be ten shillings. Indeed, I fear there was in both brother and sister a mental peculiarity, which in the lad took the active form of reckless waste, in the sister the form of mute endurance and promptness to postpone herself and her desires to the gratification of those she loved.

Ned's friend the gamekeeper came to visit at the cottage, and had Ned for a week to stay at Heathcote; and in November the man was much in the village, and, the days being short, he sometimes stayed over night. Thus he came to see Ned's sister—to see her and to fancy her. I have said that Jean was no beauty. Hers was one of those ordinary faces which abound in the world; faces of those whom God has sent into the

world to do much work, ofttimes to suffer much. But then she had lustrous eyes, that could be fired with love, with much in them of the attraction of reckless unrest. In fact, her eyes redeemed her face from plainness. They did more; they drew the gamekeeper towards her by what he in his rough way declared their fascination. "Ye hae smot' ma hairt," said he, when first he found the opportunity that for many days he had waited for; "ye hae smot' ma hairt wi' thae twa een, that glint lik' the woodcock's an' are mort as the gled's."

Jean knew nought of love save that light-hearted form of it that grows for parent or brother with the life we inherit. She was, therefore not provided with ready speech to meet his compliments, much less was she prepared to suspect that the compliments were traitorous and false. Indeed, at the first she was slow to apprehend that the man admired her, for her pleasure lay in the fact that this important functionary, much valued and trusted of his employers, and well-salaried, as Ned reported, was the friend of her brother. But when, in moonlight nights, in that November, he met her on her homeward road, and whispered of her eyes and beauty, then she bethought her, as woman will, that she was comely to look on, and that her eyes were not as common eyes, and slowly she came to believe that he was captivated by her. When once her womanhood was kindled, it burned with much rapidity and violence; yet was it slow to kindle, re

quiring much to be heated, much blown upon by the hot breath of love, before love's fierce flame resulted.

He made no secret at her father's fireside that he was following her. He did not speak of marriage; their acquaintance, his new-born fancy, was too young for that. Perhaps he did not there speak much of love either, but he let it be clearly seen that he was affected by her. The old folks thought that talk of marriage would come in reasonable time; and meantime they were proud of their daughter's follower. Thus, just at Martinmas, when her womanhood was awakened, the girl, for the first time, felt a desire for better clothing, that in the eyes of her sweetheart she might appear to more advantage; and she lacked the means to procure it. Her wages, you know, were spent beforehand, in the decoration of her brother, so that all that remained barely sufficed for strong shoes, absolutely necessary in the rigours of winter. Still the man sought her, never missing to pass one night, at least, in each week at the village in the pursuit of his suit. Yet, truth to say, there was not much heat in her bosom for him. No flame at all fired her soul for him till bleak winter brought old Christmas round. Then the gamekeeper invited Ned and her to "a ball," at his house in the hills, to celebrate the closing year. A great affair this ball was, given annually, as he told them, to the small tenantry around by the shooting gentlemen of Heathcote Lodge, who, of course, were now in their Southland homes.

He was standing at the hearth when he asked them. Ned rubbed his hands with glee. He would go most certainly. How should he get there? he asked. The cart that came to the village for the provisions could carry them. But Jean could not see her way to go. The ball will be no pleasure to the gamekeeper if she is absent from it. Why will she not go? Well, she is not her own mistress. She could not ask away from her daily duties for two days. If she did, she should only be refused. Besides, she had no other dress than her brown merino gown, her Sunday frock, which was too heavy to appear in the ball-room, among the airy dresses of the hill girls. The bold keeper would rid her of the first difficulty. He would himself request the necessary leave of absence; and as for the second, he said it was nothing at all.

So next day she saw her suitor ride on his pony straight up to the farm-house, and after a time come out therefrom, in very friendly form with the farmer, remount, and ride away. If she had known how he had performed his mission, would it at all have opened her eyes, I wonder? But this was the way in which he put his request. His masters gave an annual ball to their servants and their servants' friends, and to the small tenantry of the district. Ned Campbell, a servant highly prized, was, of course, invited, and his sister for his sake. The request for the sister's release was, therefore, in fact, a matter of the shooting gentlemen, and thus it was promptly granted. When Jean, a

night, returned home, she found a letter from her lover awaiting her. She was free to come to the ball, it said, and it begged her to accept from her sweetheart a pound-note, which was enclosed. He was sure she would be the handsomest lass at the gathering. "Now this is love in earnest," said the cottage household.

She drove in the cart to Heathcote in her Sunday gown, her brave muslin dress, with its decorations of peach ribbon, carefully folded and covered up in her lap. The day was bitterly cold, but she felt it not. Her heart and brain were aglow with a feeling she could not, cared not to conceal, which the man's grey eye saw well as he helped her from the cart. Never before was he so urgent in his pressings, and squeezings, and snatching of kisses. Of course he greatly admired the robe, and he must see the delightful process of her dressing in it, must awkwardly hook and fasten it, and surely the "beverage" was his by right. Thus, with fair speeches and loving dalliance aside, by open acts of loving preference before the assembled rustics, he danced her heart entirely away before the night was done. And, truth to say, he was a manly fellow, although full thirty-two years of age, although, also, it was a cold grey eye with which he looked into the luminous orbs of the girl whom thus he courted.

The gamekeeper came thereafter to the pensioner's cottage with openest gallantry, and the old couple received him with readiest welcome, rejoicing heartily in their daughter's prospects, wherein she, their daugh-

ter, was also glad. Still he spoke not of marriage. But in the assurance of his affection for her, unselfish even in her love, Jean felt no urgency for marriage, was very contented in her hours of labour by day because of her happiness in this man's wooing at night.

As the days lengthened in spring, her wooer met her on her way from the fields as she went homeward in the gloaming. With words of kindness he accosted her in presence of the girls, her companions in toil. He trysted to meet her to walk in the moonlight after she had "cleaned" herself. Once a week, and oftener, for many weeks, they trysted and met and walked together, down by the river bank and in the wood. Full of her love for him, doubting not his love for her, it was delight for Jean to be with him, by his side where the waters murmured, in his arms in the secrecy of the trees. A phrenzy of love was upon her, which filled her soul with a wild delight, and made her oblivious of all else in life save her love, even while she did her hard work daily as before. Ah me! It was the oft-told tale of perfidious and successful villainy in the guise of true love, hell's blackest demon in the garb of angelic humanity.

Many were envious of poor Jean. Many spoke lightly of her; and to them there were pleasure and a triumph when in April the man's visits to the village ceased. Jean knew the reason was that his duties now claimed all his days, and, no doubt, there was some truth in this. But said they, "True love is stronger nor

duty. Maybe, he is tired of thae bird, an' it's richt tae gie a turn tae the moorfool." Even for two long months, April and May, Jean saw not this man, her lover. Then fear and distress came upon her.

At first she thought it was right that he should be faithful to his duties. How otherwise could he be faithful to his love? But when week after week passed by and he came not, sent no word of love, no message to indicate remembrance of her, then her heart grew cold within her, and her soul grew sick, for her faith in him began to waver. Her cheek spoke the tides of feeling which beset her, paling oft, oft flushing, as alternate pain and shame came to her. But on the first of June she saw him. Oh yes, she saw him. That much was needed totally to undeceive her, to drive love and hope frem her miserable breast. He met her in the market-place, busy with some matter of bargaining, he said. And he greeted her as if nought of love had ever been between them; and "Tell Ned," he said, "am awfu' busy. I'll no be able to win wast." O great Disposer of all things! is there no forked lightning to blast the deceiver? no bolt of heaven to avenge the deceived?

How dry and sapless is the verdure of summer, how hot and stifling the balmiest zephyrs, how many motes darken every sunbeam, when the soul is oppressed with a sorrow which it dare not reveal for shame! And poor Jean's sorrow was of the heaviest and darkest, for she saw each false step of the way she had tra-

versed, conned every deceitful phase of the love that had betrayed her, until, every film of disguise being torn away, she stood self-condemned, her own rather than another's victim. To add to her distress, too, the old man, her father, who had pleased himself with visions of fishing in the Heathcote lochs, when summer days would let him go forth, was gravely disappointed. Her mother, whose expectations of an eligible marriage for her daughter were dissipated, brooded over her disappointment; and both blamed the girl, charging her with knowing well that she was the cause of the rupture, that it was her blame that the man had deserted her. They spoke hardly and harshly, as people who are injured will speak, when they have prerogative and power to resent the wrong. In silence she must bear her burden, without one drop of sympathy in her woe.

How sad it is thus to have life thrown out of harmony with itself and with the world which surrounds it! to have silently to bear about a heart bruised, blasted, broken, while life is young! Believe not that the fallen are so soul-hardy as not to feel the bruises and contumely of their fall. And very touching is their sorrow for its muteness, mute save when no ear heareth. When no eye seeth, then they weep and wail and pray, while ever the aching brain will fancy that, in this special case, time itself may stand still, nature's immutable law be abrogated; at least, that some impossible deliverance may arise.

Poor souls! whose only sound reasoning is when they think that death is happy.

And Jean had a grief other than her own. Ned had become hostler at the inn, and there he spent each penny he won in drink, so that many nights he came home intoxicated. She had to sit up for his coming, tired and weary with her day of labour, tired and weary of her life of sorrow, sorrow that oft made her nights sleepless, when wearily she did lie down. It is merciful that times of sorrow will not stand still, that dreaded hours will come—all too quick in their coming, and as quickly roll away. Still will the prayer vacillate from the cry that time should linger, to the dread longing that the trial should be overpast.

She gave all her wages at Martinmas to her parents. Perhaps she desired to conciliate them, but it was only what she had done before. Ned thereafter asked her for a pound, but she had it not, and he was very wroth and unkind; and at this she was very miserable. And as the days shortened to the shortest, in December, her sorrow culminated. Her long-concealed grief must be proclaimed, and she shrank from the hour that must make it known. One night she came home, meting her steps with her sighs, in her soul's great trouble; and, contrary to wont, her brother was at the fireside, and father and mother were there, and their faces were downcast and sad. Ned got up and confronted her, and by the lamplight she saw that his cheek was cut and his eye blackened.

"What's the maitter, Ned?" she asked, with a sickening smile.

"Ye broucht it on me," he fiercely answered, for one of his reckless companions had cast up her state to him, and they had fought with this result.

"Is there oucht o' truth in it, Jean?" asked the mother; and Jean was dumb before them.

"Wae's me!" said the mother. "Did I think whan I nurst ye that sic sair dool was ma store?" and she shook her old hands upraised.

Ned sullenly damned and cursed her.

The old pensioner rose slowly. "Paice, boy!" he said, "I'll no curse her. I'll no say noucht to her. But ane roof maunna shelter us mair. Lassie! ye hae nae mair a faither! Ye maun gang by the door."

"No the nicht, faither!" the mother interposed, as she wiped her streaming old eyes. "Let her be till the morn, faither!"

Well, she might stay till the morrow, but he must never see her face again, else would he curse her with a father's heaviest curse.

She crept up-stairs to her garret. She made a little bundle of some clothing, of some little things also she had prepared against a coming hour, with sorrowful stitching, which pierced her soul at each stitch. She lay down in her clothes on the bed that had known her in innocence, and wet her pillow with salt, silent tears. Her mother came to her. Briefly, and in broken words, she told her story, acknowledged her

sin, and bewailed its shame. "Perhaps faither may think better o' it the morn, puir lass!" said the mother. But ere morning broke, under the cold, chill stars the girl went forth, in dire perplexity, caring not whither she went.

She went forth under the chill morning stars, seeing nothing of their beauty, I am sure;. thankful only for the darkness which veiled her flight. Daybreak found her sitting wearily to drink of a brook five miles away from Glenaldie. What was her purpose? Whither now was she bound? Do you think that she makes for Heathcote Lodge, seeking the home of him who had brought her to this sorrow, to claim his pity, to urge him by her misery to the fulfilment of his vow unredeemed? Nay, she has no such purpose; certainly no thought of her betrayer as a possible refuge. Yet she does not curse him, as forlorn she sits by the brook-side. Her own sorrow so fills her that she cannot curse him. Perhaps she has so closed her heart against him that she thinks not of him at all.

The sun rose in the murky sky. In a hundred valleys people went forth to their day's employments, more or less gladly thinking that the day was to be fine. On a hundred hilltops the lurid beams fell cold in their brightness, while sheep and muir-fowl rejoiced in their sheen. Pity her who grieves by the wayside that night and darkness have fled. The wine of life is on the lees, surely, when the light of heaven gives only pain.

She entered an open door, with steps confused, and sat down. "Whaur dae ye com' frae, puir thing?" "Whaur till are ye boon'?" "Ye're sick, surely?" women asked while she sat there, and she answered not. They offered her food—cakes and milk—but she could not eat. Children were about her, staring at "the strange lass," as she sat bent on the creepie, concealing her face with her hands. Again and again they asked her, "Can't ye ait a morsel noo?" Still she sat there silent, weeping not. Her woe was too sore for tears.

At last a matron questioned her not unkindly. She answered only with sighs. They told her she could not be harboured there, but they would send her wherever she wished to go—at least, for some miles—in a cart after she had rested. Again they pressed her to eat, but she raised not her head. At two o'clock they yoked a cart, and told her they were ready to start with her. "What gait dae ye will tae gang?" How sore is life when the whole world-compass—north, south, east, west—is confused and confounded, presenting no choice for life's outgoing, no haven, no hope.

"Ye maun be steppin', lass. We canna shelter the lik'," they said gently but firmly. She got up and was helped into the cart, which a boy drove whither he listed, and that chanced to be into the hills. He went slowly forward until the sun went down over the southern summits; then stopping his horse, he said,

"I canna gang farther wi' ye. There's mony crofters hereawa'. Ye'll fin' shelter aisy." He helped her from the cart, and she sat down by the roadside, fain to sit and die there. He turned his horse, and went whistling off into the gloaming. The whistle and the sound of the cart-wheels died away, and still she sat by the wayside.

She felt not that the dark, chill night was setting around her, in the blacker misery of her body and soul. The minutes were painful, but she had ceased to note them. Then there came to her a God-sent messenger surely. "Wha hae we here? Puir craitar! She maun be deid or deean." It was a woman's voice that said it, with the tenderness of one who had known affliction. And the woman was not alone; beside her stood a little girl. Together they raised the prostrate one. "Com' wi' us. Try tae mak' it oot. Oor hame's nigh han'. We'll tak' ye in for the nicht." And they led her stumbling steps towards the cottage where they dwelt. It was scarce a hundred yards up the hill-side. "Haud ye up! See, ye can mak' oot the fire-licht through the panes." Scarcely half conscious she went with them, and was quickly growing sick in the heat of the peat-fire on their cottage floor—the cottage of the Widow Macraw. "Shak' doun the waifs' bed, Mary," said the widow; "she maun lie doun at aince. I'll gie her some het gruel whan she's under the claes." The widow saw what was wrong; but after a moment of hesitation, in which she felt all the burden of her

charity, she went cheerfully forward to perform what God had so clearly given her to do.

The "waifs' bed" stood in the end of the widow's byre, in which also stood her only cow, mainstay of her little household. Poor Jean was quickly lying in the bed, and the kindly widow brought her hot gruel to drink, and set two bottles of hot water beside her to warm the cold bed. "An' what may yer name be, puir lass? Nae doot ye war wranged, e'en though ye war far wrang yersel'."

"Jean."

"Puir Jean!" said the widow; and she asked no more.

Oh, bitter are the pain and anguish that have no sustenance of love, no hope of a fruition of joy! Yet the life that scarce is worth the living will cling to the pained one that fain would lay it down, as gladly this pained one there on "the waifs' bed" could have hid her shame in death. On the morrow a living child lay in her arms; and she, poor mother, was bound to life for its sake.

For ten days the widow nursed and kept Jean, giving her of her tiny milking, giving her of her slender stock of meal and other food. And as the mother nursed her boy-babe, some little gleam she had of all the rich outpouring of tenderness and beauteous feeling with which God visits the mothers who please Him. A watery, tearful gleam it was, yet fulgent with God's own tenderness, as she yearned over her son. What a strange

wonder is the human mind! This poor babe of shame not only bound her to the life she loved not, but, lying there on the wanderers' bed, fanciful hopes grew up faintly in her weak brain. Who knows? She may be proud and happy yet.

But when she was restored to strength again, was able to come with her babe, through the snow, to the widow's hearth, then Widow Macraw said she should "seek her ain folk and mak' her paice wi' them lik' a Christian lass." Leastwise, she "cudna maintain her yont a day or twa mair." Then, again, all the wretchedness of her life beset her. The hope that had shone into her breast as she watched "the bairn" died away; for her brother's face confronted her; her father's faltering yet stern decision still rang in her ears. She never dare approach them. Hagar-like, she must wander forth into her poor world's arid desert. Can you wonder that heart and flesh did faint and fail her? She felt in all its bitterness how terrible it is to be God-forsaken, feeling it the more because she first had forsaken Him.

Whither should she go? Turn to the right hand or to the left, a vista of long, long months of life from the strange hand of charity alone appeared to her, for body and arms of her were bound to the infant, whom in very wretchedness she pressed more closely to her breast. In the depths of her misery she cried to the Lord, and I think He heard her. For an angel, a good angel from heaven, all unexpected and unwished for,

stood beside her in this crisis, even the beauteous and beneficent angel of Death, who gently closes our eyes when the light of life becomes unsupportable. Oh, it came unwished for, unthought of, and full of affright! On the twelfth day, the day her wanderings were to begin, the angel stood beside the waifs' bed while the child slept. The goal must ever be won by suffering more or less, and thus the child awoke in pain. "O Jean! ye maunna steer till the bairn's better," said the kindly widow. But on the morrow of the next day it was dead. Is human life so rare and priceless that we shall bewail this babe unblest, because it came not to know life's work, life's sorrows, life's sins? Still will the poor mother weep over her embryo hope thus withered in the bud, as if her tears were rivers of water. And she wept the more in broken-heartedness, lest God, whom she only knew afar off, mostly through the cloud of her troubles, lest God who had taken it from her might ungraciously deal with its spirit, not for its own but for its parents' sins.

"Jamie Knockans," jack of all trades, down in the Leens, made for it a little "kist," as a coffin is termed in our land; a little kist of somewhat rough deal, and as paint was rare, and black cloth not at all, he blackened it with oil and soot. I am sure it mattered not in what the poor babe slept. And she washed it, and dressed it, and kissed its cold baby lips, and sobbed and wept as if God had dealt very hardly by her, nor heard her cry at all. Yet in her heart she felt that He was

a good and gracious God, whose ways not being as her ways, nor thoughts as her thoughts, had shown her mercy even thus.

"Knockans" carried the little coffin, and the widow and Jean, now bearing her bundle, followed him along the snow-clad way to the distant "acre" at Langrig, where a tiny grave—black blotch it looked on the earth's white breast—received it. The man lighted his pipe, and set coolly to fill up the gap. The mother, losing sight of the coffin, wept afresh. She offered him all the money she had—a shilling and some coppers. "Na, na," said the gruff fellow; "Na, na, puir lass; it's no for hire the noo." Then she threw her arms round the little widow, and broke out in a loud burst of grateful weeping; and they parted, Jean going whither she would.

CHAPTER II.

SIN brings sorrow not only to the individual sinner; his errors react on all around him, falling with heaviest reflux on those nearest to him. Especially so it is when the sinner is young, still of the home-group, which fills the poor heart of father and mother with anxious love. Thus it was that on the morrow of that night of grief which revealed to them that their daughter, their Jean, so long their quiet comfort, if not pride, was weak, even wicked, the old soldier and his wife sat moodily at their

cottage hearth, sighing much, groaning greatly, eating not at all. "If we haed buried her whan a bairnie, it wad hae been noucht at a' by this," said the father. "I cud aisily hae followed her corpse a month syn, better nor ken she is leevin' the day." The mother sighed and spoke not. She was not sure that her girl was of the living.

The veteran spake no word of regret for the hard mandate that had sent her from her home. Yet, perhaps, if he had had it to say again, he would not have uttered it. It was a sore day for the parents. At noon, there came in a sister-worker, asking, "Whaur' Jean? She's no been oot the day."

"She's no here," the old man answered slowly.

"Weel, whaur is she? I maun tell the grieve."

"She's no here, I tell ye," he fiercely spoke back. "I'm no her keeper! I keepit her ower lang. Gang awa!"

Poor father! he would no longer claim his erring child; and for many days neither father nor mother quitted the distressful hearth. Christmas and New-Year day came, and still they stirred not, nor brewed the jugful of punch, nor cooked the "bomb-shell" mutton dumpling with which they used to celebrate those festive days.

Indeed, they might well forego the punch-jug, for now they were fully aware of Ned's frequent intoxication. Sorrowfully the mother must sit up waiting the home-coming of the reckless youth. "Weel, weel, puir

auld faither!" the weary mother often said, "we maun gae beverin an' murnin' till oor graves! There's little pleasure o' this side o' it for us, I am feart." They were sad and weary these two old folk.

The father went not forth till the 6th of January, when he had to go to receive his pension, and, contrary to his wont, he returned alone. He could not ask one of his old veteran cronies to come with him to his unhappy home. Yet it did him good thus to be forced out, for he found that his poor little world, which he fancied was pointing the finger of scorn, or of shame, or of pity at him, was but little troubling itself with his grief or shame. Thus his load seemed lighter.

But still their grief abode with them, and I do not wonder. For the home that has known two tiny weans, prattling round the parents' knees—that has been their home when the light faces of their youth made glad the daily meals, that has witnessed the gratification of paternal love, and been lighted with paternal hope, fresh trimmed at the outgoing and incoming of the young folk, surely that home must be black with sadness when the parents croon at the fireside disconsolate and alone.

So the fishing-rod hung in the cobwebs, for unhappiness caused neglect of appearances, even when the bright May days brought the leaping trouts to the river surface. The old man could not fish, he could not stroll about. What pleasure in such things could the father take, whose finny spoils used once to awake

such innocent glee? Ever yearned his old heart within him for a joy departed, for something of gladness gone out of his poor life. Yet would he not own the aching void at his heart. Perhaps, as is often the way in such things, he inquired not what ailed him, thought it was only sorrowing anger, whilst greatly it was the extinction of his love and hope. As for the poor mother, alas! she knew what she ailed and longed for; but cowering on the wee stool at the fireside, she bore her longing in silence, breaking the silence only by her many sighs. "Whate'er haes com' o' her?" was ever the one thing at the mother's heart.

The year went by, as years will do, and towards its close the improvident Ned said boldly to his parents, "I'm gaein' tae get mairried."

"Mairried, boy!" cried they. "What waey hae ye for a wife? Ye dinna keep yersel'. Ye're daft!"

"Weel," said he, "if ye dinna gang in wi' it, I'm aff till the sodgers."

They dared not gainsay him, for the veteran dreaded the army with a horror strange in one who had spent his best days in it. He was their only son, you know, now their only child. They could not think of losing him. Still must they think of this most reckless proposal as the reckless thing it was; and they bent their old heads even while they answered him. But he went away, and made himself half tipsy, and when he must leave his lass at night, he went to sleep in his stable, so

that the parents might fully realise the hazard of losing him wholly.

At evening a neighbour came in, no doubt, of purpose to tell them the gossip which so concerned them, for visitors were rare at the pensioner's hearth. The girl their Ned was to marry was Jean Lamont, "the new waiter lass" at the inn. "Ye ken she cam' only at the Mairt'mas. Sae she's maid it up unco quick and clever." And when the parents expressed their doubts of her, as a stranger, and because she hasted in this matter, their friend very frankly stated her opinion. "Deed, ye see, she canna be muckle warth whan she'd tak' the lik' o' him."

"Surely, faither, he'll hear raison! Surely ye can bring the lad oot o' sic folly!" said the agitated mother. And the father was resolute to do what he could to that end. They sat up waiting for the youth's return; but, as you know, at midnight he was snoring in a stall. When then he came not, sadly they crept to bed, lying wakefully, however, through the restless morning hours. Fear filled their old hearts. Had he gone off as he threatened? Were they really left childless in their drear old age? Thus in unrest, they tossed about through the long morning hours, the howling hours of this December morning. And a bitter memory they have of December, for just a year ago they had lost a child. "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." Chaff bolsters too are woefully interpierced with thorns.

In their unrest they spoke of their lad. Ned had

much need of being weighted and steadied. Might not marriage bring him to that state of mind and heart so much to be desired? "But wha's tae feed them, if he cairries on as he's daean'? Gude kens, oor bit is scant enoo as we be." And this was too true; for Ned gave never a penny towards the housekeeping, and a shilling a day goes for little, expend it cannily as you may. Yet any change that gave them a hope, however feeble, of escape from their misery, was preferable to the evil that encompassed them, and they resolved to welcome Ned's marriage and his wife, if he should be restored to them.

At five in the morning the father got up, with his heart resolved on this peace and welcome, and went forth to seek his son. The bleared moon shone wearily, as it does of mornings, in the rifted heaven, while the old man wandered up and down the village, catching and hurrying towards each early footstep, going again and yet again into the cottage to tell, "I hae na seen him." It was grey light, eight o'clock, when he found him at his stable work, and blessed God and was thankful to see him once more.

On the 11th of January, in the week following "pension-day," the pension money was largely used up to provide a feast for the marriage of the pensioner's son. Not many were bidden. An old veteran, who was a bachelor, came six miles from the uplands; another old man came with his son and daughter. There were two horsey friends of the bridegroom, re-

splendent in flash waistcoats and corded garments fitting tight to their limbs; a maid from the inn, and a girl friend of the bride's, who came no one knew whence. The arrangement greatly shocked our little community; for in the ordinary case the marriages of the villagers were celebrated in a public way and place. The "best man," and some other friend, devoted a day or two to canvassing the village and the district around, as far as the parties were known, inviting all and sundry to the festival. Then, the householders who accepted "the call," some even who did not avail themselves of it, sent of their stores to the home of the bride, or wherever the feast was to be held—meal, butter, cheese, whiskey, and so forth, as each might find convenient. And when the dancing was briskest and the company warm, the "best man" made the circuit of the floor, cap in hand, and levied a money contribution from the men, and he was "nae man at a'" who failed to contribute. Thus, the guests, in fact, defrayed the charges of their entertainment, sometimes leaving a surplus of provisions and money for the start in life of the new-married pair. Whereas, here was "pensioner Cammil" breaking through all rule, outraging the legitimate expectation of his neighbours of dancing, and whiskey, and cakes, "keepin' his waddin' till himsel'," and bearing the whole charges of it.

"Gudeness kens!" said the neighbours, "they hae muckle raison tae set aboon their equals! They wadna

lik' their dochter and her wean, that'll be there, nae doot, to be seen o' dacent folk. The puir chiel, Ned! —he'll sure be drunk as blazes! Auld Cammil is richt tae keep his hoose dark for the nicht."

But the wedding guests ate of the pensioner's feast, and pledged the young couple from the punch-jug; and the old bachelor scraped on his violin, and "the party" had a dance. And the semblance of pleasure once again seemed to light up the poor cottage. The bride certainly was not much to be praised either for face or figure, but the mother-in-law was resolute to accept her kindly for her son's sake; and her name was Jean, a name dear to the cottage, sweet in the mother's mouth. "Oh, me! what but the Lord may be tae mak' us up for the loss o' oor ain puir lass!"

And notwithstanding the evil croakings and hopes of the villagers, a pleasant change came over Ned. No longer did he neglect his meals, no longer tarry late over the gill-stoup; but every sixpence he won was brought home to wife and mother. So new peace and hope filled the old hearts again, and they forgot their sorrows of other days as tranquillity and comfort were confirmed to them in the spring. The young wife, too, was not unhandy, was of an easy, pliant disposition, which readily adapted itself to the family ways. Thus the name "Jean" once more became a home word, falling pleasantly from the lips of father and mother, with much of the old accent and somewhat of the old feeling.

They never mentioned the poor wanderer. She had become to them much as one who had gone to her grave prematurely and with bitterness in her death. Ned, no doubt, had a lively recollection of her; for a day or two after his marriage, some one, "speirin' the partik'lars" of the festivity, asked him if it was true that his sister and her wean had come home. Thereupon, greatly irritated with his interrogator, he swore wildly against his sister. "She kens she needna come seekin' hame there. If she's on airth, she kens better nor tae faice me!"

How light great sorrows seem when they are more than twelve months old, especially when new sources of pleasure have been found! In the April days, when the fitful breezes were rippling the pools, and fitful shadows played over the streams, the old rod came down from its cobwebs, and the reel out of its long resting-place, the cupboard, and again the river bank and river saw the pensioner, more bent than of yore, I dare say thinner too, but still striving to win pleasure and a dish of trout 'twixt sheen and shadow on the water.

The old bridge spans the Aldie at the Haugh-craig; and down below the bridge is a deep pool, and on the steep banks the hazel and the rowan-tree crowd on each other, jostle and beat one another when the wind sweeps down the glens and soughs out beneath the lofty bridge. It was the summer term day, and many changes were being wrought out on the lives of the

country-side. But no change was at work in the pensioner's household, and there was he on a rock which jutted out into the river, clear of the hazels and the lower abutment of the bridge. The trout were biting freely, and already he had half-a-dozen in his canvas-bag, and dexterously, in the sunshine, he swept his line into the air, and gently it fell back on the pool, as lightly as a snow-flake might fall, scarce rippling the surface where the shadow of the southern bank lay on the water. His eye followed his line as arm and rod moved upwards. Once he thus chanced to glance, and his eye caught the bridge wall far up, and there his gaze got fixed; for staring down at him from the parapet was the face of a woman, and at first he thought it was the face of his wandering daughter.

He thought it was his daughter, the poor lost Jean. But if it was, then the face was greatly altered. He had no time to note how it was altered; for as soon as he caught sight of it, the face was withdrawn. Then he became aware that his rod point was dipping in the stream. He raised it, and tried to go on with his fishing, but the vision had destroyed the mental quiet needed for his pursuit, and nervously he twitched the line, and the flies fell with a splash. To what end was he thus disturbed by the recollection of his daughter's face? It had so gone away from him, that he felt no yearning for its return. Emotion at thought of her was quiet, if not dead. Yet, certainly, he was disturbed, so much that he abandoned his pleasure, reeled up

his line, unfixed his rod, and betook him to his home.

By-and-by, Ned came in for supper, and they gathered together round the evening meal, which the old man blessed and gave thanks for. As they spoke, the sire told of the face that had looked upon him, and sent him from the river. "Ah me!" said the mother, "wha kens that oor een may see her yet, gin the Lord haes spaired the puir bit lass!" The father responded not; but Ned made answer that his eyes, at least, would not look on the black jaud with pleasure. She had given him too many red faces for that. She might come when she liked: ith there she would not win. His voice was loud, and his mother was silent before him who now in some wise was the hope and holdfast of the cottage.

They had supped, and Ned was standing on the floor, about to go his ways to feed and bed his beasts, when the door of the cottage room opened, and the daughter of the cottage stood before them. She was not, as in other days, attired in tidy garments. Her raiment was rough and rent and soiled. Her countenance, too, was changed and marred, for the freshness of youth was gone from it, and it was bleared and tawny, and the lustrous eyes were dim. She stood in the open doorway before father and mother and brother, who saw and yet scarcely noted her weary, sorrowing look, and no voice bade her welcome; at first, no voice reproached her.

Ned first broke the silence—broke it by calling her the vilest name by which woman may be dishonoured, asking how she dared come there.

"It's nae till ye I cam', Ned! I dinna want tae win in. Wae's me for the grief I'm till ye! But let faither spaik tae me. Winna ye forgi'e me, faither?"

She asked it very sadly. She got no answer, save from his shaking head. The mother saw the tears on her child's face, and turned away that her own might not be seen. When she looked again, the daughter was gone from the trance.

She did not again approach them. They learned that she had found shelter in the back street with an old woman who lived there. In a few days they were told that she had found work on her old employer's farm—work for the half-year; and by-and-by they knew that she would talk with no one, avoided her fellows as much as she might, doing her labour in silence, seeking her home by by-paths, that she might shun all. Alone, as much as she might be, and silently she went on her way, nor joined the gossip of the field gang, nor smiled at the wit with which it sought to lighten labour. Sunday and market-day came, and found her tattered raiment unchanged.

Yet was it matter of much comment that, in her garment soiled and in shreds, she stole, Sunday after Sunday, into an unfrequented pew in the church, in a part afar off, where the thoughtless ones, watching her, sometimes saw her weeping when the preacher spoke

most simply of God's love and constancy. It was in those days that they who carelessly regarded her thought that her brain was touched, and called her "Queer Jean." They took up the belief—I don't know how they came by it at all—that she "went wrong" when her baby died. "Gude kens! Maybe she haid some pairt in 't," they said. Yet all the time it was not her head, but her heart, that was affected. Her poor head only suffered through the heart's woes that oppressed her.

The year ran out till Martinmas was come again, and the pensioner's cottage had fresh show of gladness once more; for, lo! a grandchild was born therein. The old man by the ingle-side brewed him a pitcherful of punch, and all who came were welcome to sip of it, for it was well with both mother and child. And Ned, now a father, was most irrationally elevated by the fact of paternity, and was tempted to call together some of the looser spirits whom he knew about the inn, that they might make merry and be glad at this special time. He got badly into liquor, and came home the worse for it; but he had been steady for so long that they thought it not much of evil. In the store-shed the working girls said how drunk he was, and "Queer Jean" heard it as she wrought her turnip-cutter. Her comrades saw it vexed her; perhaps, too, they saw a tear; but they laughed not at it and were silent, for they had learned to respect the settled sadness of her ways.

Yet very sad consequences flowed from Ned's aberra-

tion. Next day, arising with a headache, he "must hae jist a wee drap tae set him richt." Then, in course of the day, his friends of the previous night came dropping into the stable one by one; and each must "treat" him, so that by night he was well-nigh as bad as on the night before. And while he tarried slumberously in the tap-room, waiting till it was eleven o'clock at night, when his duties ceased, there came the cry of "Hostler, hostler!" He got up, and, scarcely half awake, he went out and found a commercial traveller in his gig at the door. "Now, lad! look sharp and get the beast under cover from the cold," said the man, dismounting. "Ay, ay, sir," hiccuped Ned in the frosty night air, as he led away the steed. Nearly an hour thereafter the traveller found his beast shivering at the stable-door, and the hostler dead asleep in the stall. There was very properly a great ado about it, ending in Ned's instant dismissal. Thus was the joy for his first-born converted into grief.

It was enough to turn their mirth into mourning, for the young father had lost his only chance of a livelihood in our neighbourhood. But might not, would not Mrs. Polson take him back, seeing that for so long he had served her well? Would she not give him another chance to win his bread soberly and honestly? I dare say she would have acted in a kindly spirit, and certainly Ned kept up his heart and the hearts of the little household with hope of lenient treat-

ment. But the cold after a hard drive had "foundered" the traveller's good steed, swelled its pasterns, and loosened its joints and relaxed its whole frame, so that its owner demanded heavy damages, would not relieve the worthy landlady of the beast, but intimated a law plea. Thus, poor Ned was not recalled to the stables, and dire certification was made to him and the household that he must be answerable for the consequences of his misconduct. With hanging head he sat at the kitchen fireside, or with idle hands in his breeches-pockets, whistled away the hours at the corner of the Square, eating meantime the scanty provisions which the father's thirteenpence a day sufficed to procure.

Again unhappiness and hard times beset the cottage, for Ned grew fretful to parents and wife; even his baby girl had no charm for his wayward, restless nature. In the cold January days, if a gig was bound for Inverwick, the county town, and he could get upon it, away he went, frequently without notice to the household, and sometimes he came not back for days. He was looking for a job, he would say on his return; but somehow no job came of it. Once he went off thus, and came not back again; and when they heard of him thereafter, he was an attested soldier. Great was the grief that arose thereupon. The old couple by the dim ingle bewailed him, crooned over the smouldering hearth with hearts cold with sorrow. "God break hard fortune afore him!" said the father. The

women sobbed their responses to the prayer, for much they all feared that the stern and grinding life of a soldier would ill accord with the versatile young man.

He was sent to Fort George to learn "the goose step," to be drilled into soldierhood. Two months of the cheerless, hopeless routine of that most desolate of barracks quite broke down the spirit of the lad, and he wrote very miserable letters to his father and his wife. His life was wretched, he said. He was resolved not to bear it for long. Either they must "buy him off," or he would end his days in the firth that flowed past the silent walls of the spectral fort, or, what was worse, he would desert.

Young wife and old mother fell a sobbing. Their Ned was sure to be found some morning amid the tangle and seaweed on that joyless beach, which the mother remembered from her own times of soldiering. Those were terrible days before the father yielded to them, and said he would sell their cottage to redeem their son. But who would buy the poor little house? You would wonder how readily property of every sort finds a purchaser. Since it had become his own, the old man had from time to time spent many a pound on it, fully as much as he had paid for it at the first. It was with a grieved and grudging heart that he looked out for a purchaser. House of woes and mourning, still it was his home, wherein he had seen many happy days, so that even in his present

distresses, his heart clung fast to the old door-jambs, and would not be peaceably evicted.

A purchaser who seemed kindly, if not liberal, was found. The village merchant would advance twenty-five pounds, taking an absolute disposition to the cottage, but giving a "back letter," to the effect that he would reconvey it to the old man if principal and interest were repaid to him within two years. So the deed was done, and yet so done that the veteran sat still by his old hearth. Through the intervention of the minister his son was discharged and restored to him.

Of course the transaction was greatly gossiped of by the villagers. "Cammil's surely deytit! Sell his hous' tae free sic a son! Pay a score nots tae buy aff sae fine a fella! Weel, he may mak' ready tae bid it gudebye. Auld Grippie'll hae the richts o' it certain."

To one soul in the village the gossip brought gladness, real gladness, and that was the soul of "Queer Jean." What do I say? Just this, that when Jean heard it, the aspect of life changed for her; pleasure in life, to which she had long been a stranger, once again found her. How was this? She rejoiced not because the tidings meant sorrow in the cottage that disowned her, not because she foresaw her father's inability to redeem the cottage. In her loneliness she felt and shared in all the sorrow that befell them. But this special sorrow and inability was her special advantage and silent pleasure. In due time *she* would

redeem the home. This was the sunbeam that fell through the mists upon her, gladdening her lone life, giving her an object in living. She had spent nought of her money wage except for rent, and thus she had accumulated somewhat already. Now she could count the one-pound notes, which heretofore she had never cared to look at, scarcely recollected to have laid by, and each one of them became a precious thing, means and instrument by-and-by to tell the love of father and mother and brother that burned in her weary heart.

Restored to his friends, Ned, now, in his twenty-first year, must go learn a trade. He selected that of blacksmith, as somewhat cognate to his former calling, — cognate, you know, through the shoeing of horses and the tiring of cart-wheels. A great change had been wrought in him by his six months of discipline. No doubt, as the future proved, the recklessness of his nature had not been utterly beaten down and eradicated, although, indeed, it was much crushed. No longer did he look upon life as a thing to be tossed about in boyish pastime. He had ceased to regard youth as an alleviation of wrong-doing, and to give up this hallucination is, I think, a beginning of wisdom. So steadily he toiled away, although his wage was but six shillings a week, and his apprenticeship was to endure for six years; soberly, calmly, cheerfully toiled from week to week, and week after week laid the poor little wages in his mother's

hands. It was in August that he began to work, and his father's plan was this. They all should live, as best they might, on the pension, and the apprentice's fees should go to clear off the debt and interest for which the cottage stood impledged.

Still a better change was manifested, when, on an autumn evening, Ned stood at the door of his poor sister's bothy—for I should have told you that the old woman who had first received Jean therein lay in the kirkyard. "Sister," said he, "wull ye cam' hame? If ye wull, I'll clear the road for paice." "Nae!" was all her answer, calmly but distinctly given—given without sign of hope, and he turned away abashed. But how did her heart leap within her at the proposal, anticipating the hour when she, proudly bearing the redemption of her home, would go to her people! And well he might be abashed, for his was the voice that had repulsed her from her father's door; his the hand that with the hot iron of selfish, resentful anger, had seared and burnt her soul.

It is easy even for poverty to get under the millstone of indebtedness. Escape from it is a wondrously hard work. Sometimes many special things will conspire to prevent deliverance, to thwart all efforts towards it. Meal was very dear that year, and the two or three drills of potatoes which the old couple had planted with tears in the spring, were blighted by the blight in the autumn. Perhaps, too, they miscalculated the purchasing power of the pension-money,

for when it was paid in October, it was mostly pre-engaged. "Skin for skin," said the evil one; "yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." In the present need the salvation of the homestead was forgotten, and the son's wages went into the porridge-pot.

Nay, it was not forgotten. How could it be, seeing that at Martinmas the merchant came claiming rent for the past half-year? "If you pay the debt and interest, the rent will, of course, stand you in the reckoning. But, meantime, I am not to take a bare interest on my cash." Two pounds ten he demanded, and thereat the little household was aghast, not comprehending the transaction, seeing only that thus all their hopes of saving were swept away. They had no money wherewith to pay it, and the creditor said they abused his goodness and liberality. He spoke also of his rights as landlord, and of the sheriff-officer. The old soldier was terribly unnerved and shaken. He would pay in January, when he got his money, he humbly said. Coldly the rich man turned away, saying that he must secure himself of payment; and the veteran sat down on his stool and cried outright. When with trembling hand he had dried his tears, and stood up, he feebly complained of a sharp pain in his chest. "It gaes doon my airm," he said, raising his left arm while he pressed his right hand on his chest. "I maun lie doun and rest a bit;" and he lay down with the tears in his old eyes on his old and uneasy bed.

Half an hour later, the swarthy blacksmith came in for his supper, and none of them mentioned the new distress that had arisen; but "Granfaither's nae weel the nicht wi' sair pain i' his breist." The pain itself was gone, and the old man was sitting at the hearth. "I ne'er feelt the lik' o' yon pain," he said. "It went dirlin' roun' ma auld hairt, gey unchancey lik'." Too truly, the mischief lay at his heart. That night week, as he lay in bed, awake and waiting for his wife to lie down beside him, suddenly he said he felt that pain again. At the call of the old woman, son and daughter-in-law were promptly at the bedside. The old man moaned once and again, "Ma breist, ma breist! Gie me watter!" They raised his head, for he seemed powerless. They held a bowl with water to his lips, but he drank not; for while they held him in their arms the old man passed away from the sorrow and cares which so much oppressed him, to the everlasting quiet that stills and solaces the worst of human woes.

The sun shone bright on the whitewashed wall, with that crisp and cheery light which a frosty November day sheds on the cold, chill world. You could not have guessed in the external light and brightness, that within the white wall of the cottage its old tenant lay stark and stiff in death. At mid-day a mourner, dark and dirty, entered the doorway, raised the latch, and stood before them all. Silent she stood for a moment, then in hoarse tones muttered, "Ma faithers'

deid! I maun see his corp' in paice!" It was the daughter Jean. They stayed her not. They did not welcome her. The mother, now widow, on a stool at the fireside went on rocking her body backwards and forwards, "makin' her maen," for to her this dispensation was specially bitter. The daughter went to the bedside where the body of her father lay, underneath the white sheet, which she folded down from the rigid old face. At sight of it a great sob burst from her rugged breast, a great cry was wrung from her, "He did ne'er forgie me!" A gentle woman would have kissed the cold face, a gentler soul would have knelt down and prayed God to do what the earthly father had not done. Jean only cried again in anguish, "He did ne'er forgie me!" They did not one of them seek to comfort the heart-stricken daughter; offered her no word of sympathy in her special sorrow. Perhaps they were each so engrossed with grief that they had no eye or sense for the suffering of others.

In a few days after the old man was buried the merchant hypothecated the poor household stuff that was the cottage furniture for security and in payment of his rent. If his claim was just, this certainly seemed the only source from which he could obtain payment. But he offered to forego the claim of rent altogether, if the deceased's heir gave up the back letter, paid him £1 5*s.* by way of interest, and evacuated the cottage at the following Whit-Sunday. Poor helpless things, they accepted his terms, for they

clung to the poor sticks of furniture eagerly now that their home was lost.

Ned laboured on for a month, steadily sticking to his trade, but that time was enough to show him that his toil would not suffice to feed those who now depended on him solely. What were his six shillings a week? Indeed, one shilling each week was paid towards the debt entailed by his father's funeral, and with the tiny balance there were three mouths to fill, besides the halfpence for baby's milk. Well-nigh in despair, he stated his case to his master, the blacksmith, setting forth the urgency for his betaking himself to ordinary labour, so that his weekly wage might be enlarged. The man saw the case was urgent, and let him go; and almost joyously Ned found himself in the field digging drains, joyous for that he earned eighteenpence a day. The wage would expand with the lengthening day.

To the lone, silent woman in the back street the father's death was a cruel wound. She had so wrought out her scheme for aiding that father when his extremity should draw near, had so pictured the joy of the redemption of the cottage, and forecast so largely her own restoration to it, a prodigal truly, but stealing back to the old father to show him that even in her farthest wanderings he and home were not forgotten. Oh, it was cruel that all this pleasure, that all this hope was vanished, buried with him who was the centre of her visions! It quite crushed her. She went

for days without lighting her fire or cooking food. It was probably the routine of labour that forced her out at early morning, and detained her late of evenings; that occupied her muscles, and stayed the strain upon brain and nerves; this routine it probably was that saved her tottering reason. Souls only who have panted for forgiveness, staked all the joy of life upon the hope of being forgiven, can gauge the woe of her whose hope was dead.

In early February the silent snow came down over the fields, and labour was stopped. Of course there was no work and no pay for the luckless Ned. Yet for the first fortnight of this weather his employer gave him two stones of meal a week, to tide him over the hard time, barely enough to keep bodies and souls of them together. No doubt the allowance would have been continued. But poor Ned sickened at the hearth where was no fire, while mother, and wife, and bairn sought now and again the warmth of a neighbour's ingle. I dare say he was hungry too, as well as down-hearted in his idleness, as down-hearted he must be at sight of the pale faces of his wife and child. Perhaps he despaired of ever seeing those pale faces rosy and joyous through his labour. Who knows the spirit of a man, what he can bear, what do? But ere the second week was ended, Ned went forth and returned not.

When his disappearance was noted and published about, so also was the unhappy fact that the cottage was the merchant's past redemption. It was even said

that Ned had got a sum by way of reversion on surrendering the back letter, and fled therewith.

Then the daughter once more stood in the cottage. "Ned haes gane frae ye," she said.

Her mother was sitting with her grandchild on her knee. "Weel," she answered, "it mak's nae muckle differ tae us i' the foord o' pourtith. We were a' stairvin' when he gaed oot."

"Ye maun come wi' me. I hae store! Ye're ma mither, an' hae nane but me."

"Ay, dochter; there's this puir wean an' its mither. I winna quit them, though I stairv' wi' them."

"Cam' wi' me, mither! I hae routh for twa. I dinna ken them at a'. Cam' wi' me!"

While she spoke, the little child had slipped from the old woman's knee, and came toddling to the tattered skirt of its aunt, and the instinct of the woman within her, long congealed and frozen, suddenly thawed away at the touch and voice of the child. She took it up, and peered into its face; and a great sickness and yearning came over her desolated heart, like, I dare say, to the tingling pain that comes to limbs benumbed on the return of warmth. She was thinking of another baby face. In her sickness she sat down on a stool at the fireside, where was no fire; on the little stool that, in other days, had been "her own stool," and still she held the child.

And now she would have them all to her little cabin. "Ye beit tae leave this whatever, and I hae meal and

milk; leastwise, a little portion; an' wages forbye. I can keep ye a' through spring. Perhaps the wean's mither can help a bit."

She was a strange protectress this for a helpless household. Her dress, bemired and tattered, scarce hung about her body. Her hair was unkempt, and her face unclean, and the hands that proffered aid were horny and coarse. Their alternative was the harder, coarser charity of the poor's roll; and the child and its grandmother would go to sup with her when at night she came home from her labour.

They found her in her room, unswept and uncheered, save by the blazing peat fire, at which she was making porridge for them. She gave them few words of welcome, for speech had almost gone from her. But her face and eyes spoke out the welcome that the voice gave not; told of pleasure restored to her whose life had been all coarse pain only, and blunted regret, so long that the face could not fashion itself to smiles. It was clear that she had eaten to live, and no more; for her allowances of meal had accumulated into quite a store, in sacks and old barrels, and in an old wash-tub. Musty and damp in its ill-keeping it must be, yet was it well to see it thus laid up. She showed her money to her mother also—full thirteen pounds; and the meal and the money were all for the mother, if only she would come to her.

They all came from the old home where famine pined, to the bothy of the daughter, and they brought all

the old furniture with them. They swept up her floor, and brightened her poor home when they came; and slowly the dead feelings of life awoke within "Queer Jean" again in the companionship which sore calamity had won for her. And Jean would clothe her mother with a black wincey gown and a widow's cap, which poor symbols of grief had hitherto been beyond her reach. The mother would not have them unless Jean got a gown for herself. There was some debate about it, but at length they were both attired as was fitting. And after that they were found together again in the old church pew; and I am sure that joy was mingled greatly with sadness, perhaps I should say that their sadness was sprinkled with joy.

I do not know that poor Jean could for long have borne the burden thus adopted, but the same friend, that had aforetime succoured her, again came unlooked-for to lessen her load. In early May Ned's widowed wife gave birth to a baby boy and died. People said she was "broken-hearted;" but for that, I think, so were they all. The survivors took up the infant tenderly, and nursed it with milk from the worker's pitcher, and it grew up a winsome child. But just when it had learned to name its "grannie," in the February, which was two years and three months after the pensioner went to his rest, his widow also died. It was matter of wonder how constantly and long poor Jean bewailed her, but I think I know why her grief

was so persistent. When in her evil days, in her lonely sorrow, she had sorrowed most, even then she felt not utterly alone, for "up by" dwelt father, and mother, and brother. What although they had cast her from them? Still they were there, filling some gap in her poor heart, giving her some holdfast and hope in life. Then when her mother came to her the blankness in which she so long had laboured was changed into a life with some little pleasure in it, if only the pleasure of stinting herself for the mother's sake. Now father and mother were with the dead. The brother was not; and she, poor woman, stood alone on the earth, feeling her isolation bitterly.

It was well that the two little children stood between her and a life blank and objectless. Rough woman as she was, she was very tender with them. At first it was perplexing how to deal with them, as she must go forth to her labour daily. But right ready are the poor to help such as they; and the widow next door cared for "the bairns" while Jean was absent. And now she has toiled for and fed them for seven long years. They are the well-spring of life's gladness to her, she a loving mother, and more than mother, to them, specially watchful and tender of the young girl on her knee, who now is saying her evening prayer. Thus she sits in her cottage door in the evening sun, with the children, feeling, dimly and indistinctly no doubt, still feeling somewhat of the pleasantness that God sheds into the humblest hearts that serve Him.

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